Love Stories ALL-STORY

MARCH 27

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The Rivals
by Beulah Poynter

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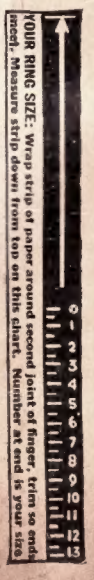
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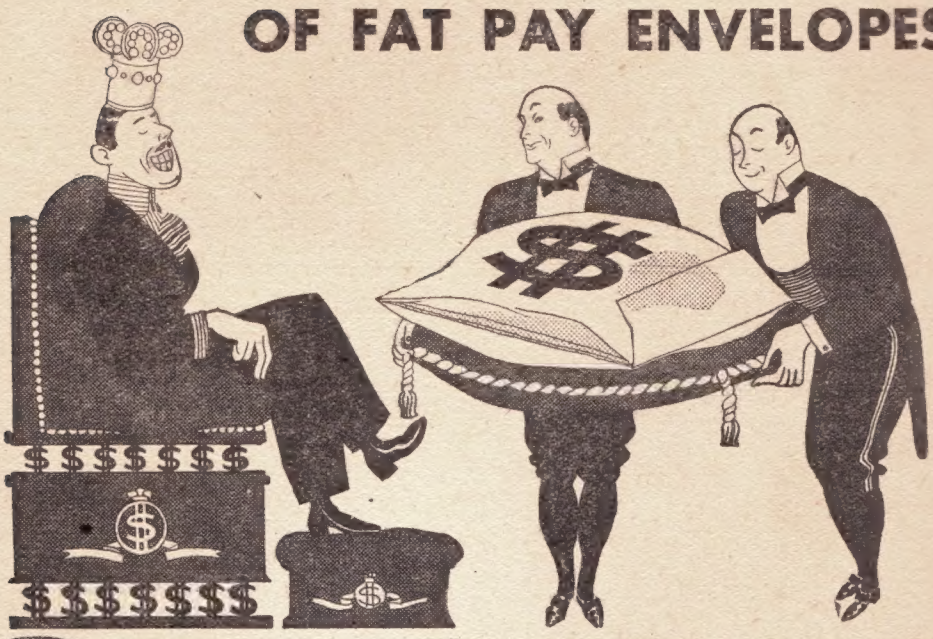

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Volume LXV
Number 5

Love Stories ALL-STORY

March 27
1937

Issued Weekly. On Sale every Wednesday

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"You married me," he reminded her. "Now laugh that off"

Love Me Again

By VAL NEWELL

THE scene was set for romance. It had everything—scattered madrona trees with their back peeling, a brilliant fall moon. A hundred feet below, tiny waves tossed white streamers against the rocks at the foot of the bluff.

The bay was beautiful, the blue-black silhouette of distant foothills across the water. The girl was beautiful, too.

"Don't take it so hard," she said. "It isn't the first time I've eloped"

There was even, as a little push to romance, an owl in a tree that went "Whoo-oo!" and startled Jac so that she jumped with a little cry.

But Kerry Newton did not take her into his arms and tell her he would protect her, and that everything was all right. Not Kerry! Oh, no.

He stood so close to the edge of the bluff that a tiny shove would have sent him over. He lighted a cigarette and sent the flaming match spinning down

among the jagged rocks below. He said:

"Nice night, isn't it?"

And he stood quite eight feet away from her.

In the shadows Jac suddenly began to tremble. Her heart beat terribly, and her hands doubled into clenched little fists. She couldn't stand this—she couldn't! One whole week, with dates every single night, and tomorrow he was going away. The rodeo would be over, and he'd go back to being a cowboy somewhere—she didn't know just where. The important thing was that he hadn't given her a tumble.

Oh, dates and dances and swims and that sort of thing. And so nice and friendly, so pal-ish about it! Anyone would think her a fifteen-year-old boy, instead of a very popular girl of twenty.

She couldn't let him get away without so much as a kiss. She simply couldn't! Her pride wouldn't stand for it. Why, every other man she knew had made love to her. They'd told her about her hair and her eyes and her lips. Why shouldn't he?

She began saying things, tensely.

"Kerry, you don't like me, do you?"

"Like you?" He turned, and that threw his face into a shadow so that she could not read his expression. "Sure I like you. Why not?"

"Then what's wrong with me?" she demanded in a stifled voice.

"Nothing. That is, nothing much. You're badly spoiled and need a good switching, but otherwise—"

She came closer to him. She put both hands up on his shoulders and swayed a little. Not by intention, either.

"Then—oh, why won't you kiss me? I'm not poisonous."

Kerry started as if a bullet had whizzed past him. For a wild moment she thought he was going to do it. To take her into his arms and kiss her until she was faint. But he didn't.

He took her hands down and stepped back.

"Because, Jac," and his voice was strained, "I'm simply not that sort of person. When I kiss a girl, I like to mean it. And you don't. You expect every man to fall for you. You're mad if they don't make love to you. Well, I'm not going to be one of your—male harem. Sorry to disappoint you, but you asked for it."

He turned toward the car, but she was there before him. Slim and lovely, with the moon shining softly down upon her dark blond hair that just missed being brown. Putting silver glints upon it.

"Kerry!" she cried breathlessly. "Kerry, you don't understand. I—"

She stopped, because she couldn't go on. She couldn't say what she'd started to say, and she couldn't think of any substitute.

He caught her by the shoulder and turned her to face the moon. He looked at her for a long time. His face was white, and there was a queer glint in his bronze eyes.

"If this is a line, darn you—" he muttered.

And then his arms went around her. Thrilling arms that left her breathless. Arms that were safe and sure and, oh, so strong!

When he kissed her, Jac knew that not Boyd Laren nor any other man had ever meant a thing to her. She knew that if this cowboy asked her to go to the ends of the earth with him, she would go. Knew she'd fallen hopelessly, irrevocably, passionately in love.

Kerry lifted his head sharply. Amazement was on his features.

"Why, Jac—you mean it! You love me!"

"Yes." It was a breathless whisper.

After a moment his mouth tightened grimly. He caught her up and deposited her in the deep, springy cushions of the car. Her car. Then he was beside her, snapping on the ignition.

"Kerry, what are you going to do?"

"Get married, of course. Before you change your mind."

She laughed shakily. "I shan't change my mind."

"Grand; but we might as well get married, anyway."

"You do things in a rush, mister."

"This isn't a rush, my most gorgeous angel. I've been wanting to do it for a week. Do you mind?"

He pulled on the emergency as the car swung up to the edge of the highway, and caught her in his arms again. He kissed her and kissed her, deliriously, and after a while Jac admitted that she didn't mind at all.

"Anyway," he added more reasonably, when they were whizzing down the highway with the wind in their faces, "I haven't much time. I'm going back tomorrow, you know. And," his arm pulled her tight against him, "you're going with me."

"It'll be sweet," Jac whispered.

And that thought stayed with her, while they came to a sleepy town and routed a county clerk out of his bed and got the license.

It would be sweet to belong to Kerry and have people call her "Mrs. Newton." Sweet to watch him ride untamed horses as he'd done at the rodeo, and know a thrilling pride because he was her man. Her husband!

They stood on the sidewalk outside the justice's house afterward, and eyed each other unsmilingly. Kerry looked a little scared at what they had done, and Jac felt suddenly awfully shy.

She couldn't think of anything to say, and she couldn't quite meet Kerry's eyes with the bronze flames in them. She looked at the tips of her small, expensive blue suede pumps until Kerry's hand went firmly under her elbow and piloted her back to the car.

They sat in the roadster, both looking at the chromium grayhound on the radiator cap. Jac murmured, shakily:

"Dad will be wild."

Kerry's hand lifted slowly.

"Say, you do have some folks, haven't you? We'll tell them, right away. Wonder where there's a public phone?"

She caught his arm, frightened.

"Don't do that, Kerry! You don't know dad. It'll be a lot better to see him in person. Or we can just go, and wire him."

"We can't do that, honey," he protested. "He's your dad. I'll tell you, I'll go to his office."

"All right," Jac agreed, almost indifferently.

She couldn't exactly see why he should make all this fuss over her father. Certainly dad had never fussed over her. But maybe that was the way they did things where Kerry came from.

The night was beginning to lift when they passed the airport at the edge of the city. And when they stopped in the driveway of the house where Jac lived with her father and six servants, crimson streaks were penciling the horizon.

With her head against his shoulder, they watched the sunrise. First red and black, then gold and pink, then saffron.

"Beautiful," Kerry whispered.

But when she looked up, she found his eyes on her and not on the sky. He kissed her little laugh into silence.

"Listen, sweet, the train leaves at three. Be ready around noon, will you? I'll call here for you."

"All right." Her red mouth trembled suddenly. "Kerry, dad'll be nasty. I know he will. You won't let him say anything that matters?"

His arms tightened. "Is there anything that could matter?"

"No. Only—" Her voice was muffled against his tie.

"Don't you worry, sweet. I'm good at bearding lions in their dens."

He left her at the door with her lips still tingling, and with an ache in her heart she watched him go. Against all her reason and judgment and common sense, she was afraid. Afraid that she would not see him again, for a long time.

JAC was small and smart in a blue-gray suit, and fox furs. She was the very last word in chic as she sat in the leather office chair, facing her father. She was also the last word in icy indignation.

"If you'll stop raging, dad, about what a disgrace I am, you might take the time to tell me what's the matter. I thought I'd been behaving pretty well lately."

"It's outrageous!" her father retorted angrily. "It's the most indecent thing I ever heard of."

Jac waved a small gloved hand wearily.

"You said that before, darling. Suppose you tell me just what set you off."

"Sure, I'll tell you!" Clive Lowell bellowed, lumbering to his feet. "What set me off was a slick, good-looking cowboy who claims he married you last night! Did he, or didn't he?"

Jac looked at him in some surprise. She had known he would fuss, of course, but why so dramatic over it? As far as she could see, there was nothing outrageous in getting married, even by elopement.

"Yes, I married him," she admitted. "And what of it? Of course I should have let you know first. But—I'd probably do it again."

"And make a fool of yourself all over," he retorted. "Cut up all you like, Jac. You know I've never kicked. But when you go in for affairs with fellows like Boyd Laren and this Kerry Newton, I'm calling a right-about-face!"

"Affairs!" she whispered, wondering if he could ever have the faintest inkling of how she felt about Kerry.

"Yes, affairs. I suppose I should be grateful to him for getting your mind off Laren. But as it happens, he's a darned sight worse."

"You can't say that, dad! You don't know Kerry Newton. He's everything fine."

"I'll admit he gives that appearance. I thought so, for the first minute. But if he's so fine, why did he wangle a ten-thousand-dollar loan out of me in return for giving you up?"

Jac turned slowly, unbelievingly. Her blue eyes were wide with horror.

"You don't mean that," she whispered. "It isn't true."

He snorted. He ruffled papers on his desk until he found a small oblong thing. Jac took it, sharply afraid to read what it said:

> One year from date, I, Kerry Newton, promise to pay to Clive Lowell the sum of ten thousand dollars.

There it was, in black and white, with Kerry's signature at the end. Queer, she had seen that signature only once before. On a marriage license.

She stared at it until the letters blurred together. Her father took the paper from her nerveless fingers at last.

"I didn't expect it, myself," he went on brusquely. "He seemed like a pretty decent chap, but just as a matter of

course I pointed out the difference between your being my daughter and the wife of a penniless cowboy.

"Simply to see if he was worth a hang, I offered him five thousand dollars to let you alone, and not object if you decided to have the thing annulled. He turned it down, but he said he'd take a loan of double the amount. And of course he realized that, if he fails to pay it back, I'd naturally hesitate to prosecute. Whatever else he may be, your Kerry Newton isn't dumb."

Jac laughed, a little harshly.

"All right. What are you going to do with the body? I mean with me?"

"Don't take it like that," he protested. "The fellow's worthless. Why, I thought it might be a good idea to send you out to the ranch."

"Have you got a ranch?" she asked dully.

He shot her a wry glance. "I've got a ranch. Clever, my manager, will see to it that you don't get into any trouble. And if it's man trouble you're bound to get into, there are plenty of punchers around there, hand-picked by Clever. If you feel in the mood for cowboys, choose any one of them and you'll have a man—not a sheik with blackmailing tendencies."

A WEEK later a big, silver-winged monoplane settled down on a level patch of ground before the house of the Spanish Peak Ranch. From the cockpit stumbled a very weary little Jac, rumpled curls peering out from beneath a white helmet.

A stout, middle-aged woman with a motherly air came from the house. She started talking before the girl could get her lips open.

"You must be Jacqueline Lowell. Yes, I'm sure you are! You've got your father's eyes, child. And you flew all the way in that thing? Land, you must be tired to death!"

Jac smiled despite herself.

"I am rather tired," she admitted. "You're Mrs. Clever, aren't you?"

"Yes, I am. Now I'll tell you. You just come inside and lie down on the couch, and in just no time I'll have a bite to eat fixed for you. When the boys come, they'll put that critter away." With a wave of a plump hand at Jac's sleek ship.

It was lovely to be taken care of, not by incurious, automatic servants, but by someone who acted as if her welfare really mattered.

Inside the big, beamed ranch living room, Jac took off her helmet and released her curls. Mrs. Clever took away her jacket, and told her to lie down and make herself at home.

Jac did just that. She curled up on the davenport and let her eyes rove over the room, with its homelike air that the big Lowell house had somehow never achieved. She sniffed of frying bacon and eggs and warmed-up potatoes, and felt as if she had never been so hungry in her life. She had the nicest feeling that she was going to like it here at Spanish Peak.

She got up and wandered toward the kitchen, where she watched Mrs. Clever scrape food onto a plate, gather up a handful of silverware and a glass of water, and set them on the square kitchen table.

"Hope you don't mind eating in the kitchen," she apologized.

Before Jac could reassure her, the door opened, and a pile of wood came in. That's what it looked like, at first glance. And then she noticed that atop the wood was a rumpled shock of crisp brown hair, and beneath, two long legs.

The wood went down with a clatter, and the man straightened up, brushing chips and splinters from his sleeves.

"Look, Ma, do you suppose if I made it sheep, the Spanish Peak boys would string me up? There's quick money in sheep."

He stopped, catching sight of the girl, standing small and slim in her flying togs and polished boots. A dull red crept into his cheeks.

Jac wanted to die. She wanted to smile icily and say something cutting. She wanted to turn and run as fast as she could. But all she could do was stand staring at Kerry Newton, her blue eyes stricken.

Mrs. Clever smiled brightly.

"Jac, this is Kerry Newton. Miss Lowell is the boss's daughter, Kerry. She just flew out here—"

Her words trailed off as she watched them with growing puzzlement.

Jac murmured, stiffly, after a long time, "I've met Mr. Newton."

Kerry took a swift step forward. "Jac—"

But he stopped, because Jac smiled. There wasn't a particle of warmth in that bitter smile. She did not say anything, because she did not have to.

He turned swiftly and went out.

Mrs. Clever looked at the slammed door thoughtfully.

"Now, that's about the first time I ever saw Kerry Newton act like that."

"Does he—live here?"

"No, but he's over here a lot. He has a place of his own, that's pretty well gone to seed. He managed to borrow some money when he went to the rodeo, but land! With that big place he could use three times that much. Why, it used to be the biggest bit of property around, before his dad got a-hold of it."

Jac sat down at the table with absolutely no appetite now. But her hostess talked on as if glad to have a listener.

"Kerry's a real nice young fellow. He'll be working here for a couple of weeks because Bill is short-handed right now. Of course," she added, "carrying wood isn't his job; he's really our broncobuster. You'll probably see him again when he feels more polite. I don't know what ever got into him."

Jac stifled a laugh, because she knew the woman would not understand that particular kind of laugh.

What a joke on her! Running all the way from the city to the wilderness, only to find that of all spots, this was where Kerry lived!

She hadn't run away from him at all, she'd run after him! He'd think that, of course. That he'd left her, and she had gone after him with her plane. What a *joke*.

She finished the late supper and let her hostess show her the corral and the bunk-house, and her own little flock of chickens, and the back garden that they kept watered by a pressure system.

She was introduced to the men when they came, and to big Bill Clever. But Kerry had not stayed. Mrs. Clever thought it was a shame, too, because Kerry was a real nice young fellow, with neither chick nor child for company on that big, dilapidated ranch of his.

It was four days before Jac saw him again, and then it was only by accident.

SHE had ridden up Spanish Peak, and along the trail found a grassy, level spot that commanded a marvelous view of the country below. So she fastened her horse to a nearby tree and flung herself on the ground. She hadn't intended to go to sleep, but it was a warm day, with a caressing breeze, and somehow it had happened.

She opened her eyes, a long time later, to find that a tall man with bronzy eyes was looking down at her. Looking and looking, as if he could never get enough. Following the lines of her rumpled brown-blond hair, and her defiantly red mouth, and the curve of her throat.

Icy contempt dawned in her eyes as she recognized him. She rose swiftly to her feet.

Kerry said, stiffly, "You shouldn't go to sleep like that, Jac. It's dangerous. There are rattlers and things."

And then a moment later she found herself caught tight against his chest, in arms invincibly strong.

"Jac, darling, I've missed you so! I've been wanting you and wanting you, every minute."

"Aren't you breaking your bargain?" she demanded angrily, because words were the only thing she could fight him with, now.

"Meet the boss's daughter, Kerry," said Mrs. Clever brightly.
And Jac stared, stricken, into the eyes of the husband she had flown hundreds of miles to escape.

He released her so quickly that she stumbled. He was terribly white.

"Yes, I was. I shan't forget again. But—don't hate me, Jac!"

She turned away, toward where Niger was tied.

"I don't hate you," she shrugged. "You're hardly that important, are you?"

"Maybe I'm more important than you think," Kerry said, and Jac jerked more viciously at the knot than was necessary.

Side by side, they rode in silence down the trail. Dusk was falling when they led the horses into the barn and stabled them.

In the semi-darkness, just before they went outside, Kerry caught her in his arms again. And this time Jac did not fight. He kissed her with a sweet, leashed passion. As if he could hurt her with only his mouth, if he let himself go. As if he had lain awake nights, thinking and thinking about her.

Jac did not intend to respond. She had meant to treat him like dust. But she couldn't help herself when she felt his arms tightening about her. And only after she had answered his kiss did she double up her fists in panic and beat against his shoulders.

When he let her go, she stumbled back against a post and sobbed, silently, brokenly. After a minute a warm hand closed over her arm.

"I'm sorry, Jac. But you wanted it. You know you did! As much as I did."

"I didn't!"

"Darling, don't lie. You love me. You can't help loving me, any more than you can help breathing, or thinking."

It sounded conceited, but it wasn't. Even while Jac was telling herself that he was a conceited fool, she knew that he was only saying the truth. So she said, as icily as she could with a sob still in her voice:

"Don't you think you're wasting valuable time that you could be spending, say, in improving your haywire ranch?"

"Jac!"

She laughed, a trifle wildly. "You're being so silly; I didn't follow you out here. You ought to know I didn't. I admit you interested me for a while, but I always get tired of people quickly. Especially the ones that fall in love with me. They're interesting when they're themselves, but when they start talking about love, they get so boring!"

"Jac—"

"They do! Only I got to thinking, maybe since you were awfully interesting there might be other cowboys who'd be different, too. So I asked dad if he'd let me come out here. Only of course if I'd known I'd run into you, I'd never have come."

The fingers on her arm were so tight she almost cried aloud in pain.

"That doesn't hang straight, Jac. You married me. You can't laugh your way out of that!"

"What of it?" she demanded recklessly. "It isn't the first time I've eloped. Oh, I've never gone so far as to say the words before, but I could name half a dozen times when I didn't change my mind until after we'd got the license. That night—I think the moon must have been especially bright. Wasn't it?"

Silence. And then the hand dropped away from her arm. Kerry said, quietly:

"Yes, I remember that the moon *was* especially bright."

Just that. And then he was off toward the bunkhouse, and she was stumbling toward the ranch house.

The first thing she did when she got inside was to send a wire to Boyd Laren.

BOYD was crazy about her. He was heartbreakingly handsome, with devilish eyes, and he had an endless circle of girls around him. Only somehow he managed to sidetrack them most of the time, so that he could circle around Jac.

She'd thought Boyd thrilling, once. But he'd lost the power to thrill her, the very afternoon they went to the rodeo for a lark, and saw a lean cowboy stick on a horse long enough to win five hundred dollars.

Boyd came to Spanish Peak by special plane. She had forgotten how much charm Boyd had. She had forgotten the glamour that the slightest tinge of notoriety had given him. Nothing definite, you know, but— That sort.

Boyd made himself quite at home, and if he noticed that nobody but Jac seemed to like him, particularly, he never let on.

Very shortly he learned why he had been invited—to take up as much of her time as possible, without imposing his affections upon her. To keep her from thinking about Kerry.

He was patient, at first, but finally he registered a protest. It was one of those dark, threatening days when you think there's to be a storm any minute. They had gone riding over the network of trails, in direct defiance to the rain gods.

Boyd said, ruefully, "Isn't there something else to do here? I've hiked a thousand hills, and I loathe hiking. I've ridden a million trails, which is about one million too many. And we've worn out all the clouds and used up all the gasoline, flying around in that monoplane of yours. What am I, a stooge? Let's make love for a change."

"All right," Jac agreed. "You make love, and I'll listen. Make love to your horse, first, and if it's any good I'll see if I have time for an appointment with you."

"You know it's good, darned good," he retorted. "What did I ever do to be treated like this?"

"Don't be unreasonable! I wanted a friend to visit me, not a gigolo."

"Jac, marry me."

She turned to look at him, to see if he really meant it. And he did, if torrid, dark eyes and a slightly grim mouth were signs to go by.

"But, Boyd," she said, distressed, "I can't marry you! I'm sorry if I've seemed to encourage you, but I've never even thought about you that way."

"And why not, Jacky?"

She was at loss to find words. It occurred to her that she had been rather thoughtless in her treatment of him. But she hadn't dreamed he was taking her seriously. Before she had met Kerry, they had played around at love, of course. She thought he'd known it was only play.

"I know why not," he went on with sudden harshness. "It's Newton. That cute cowboy pet you found at the rodeo. He's out here, isn't he? And you followed him here, and quarreled, so you're using me as a club to beat him back into line. Right?"

"No, no! Boyd, please, you've got everything wrong! I didn't know Kerry was here when I came out—honestly I didn't."

He laughed unpleasantly.

"All right. But if it's true, why did you ask me out here and then treat me like a big brother? Lordy, Jac, I'm only human! And you know I've been in love with you for months."

"I'm sorry," she said, and meant it.

"You won't marry me?"

"I *can't* marry you!"

"Because you love Newton?"

"No, of course not! I don't love him. I don't even like him, any more. Boyd, I'm sorry. I guess I didn't realize what I was doing."

"It's all right."

He smiled lopsidedly and tore his dark gaze away from her. Jac felt more ashamed of herself than she had ever been before. How awful, to do that to him. Deliberately lead him on and then turn him down, like a heartless flirt in a movie.

Only it hadn't been deliberate, she told herself anxiously. It really hadn't. She'd thought he felt the same way about it as she did. She'd thought—Oh, what did it matter what she had thought, now? It wasn't helping Boyd.

They galloped back toward the blackest cloud, Boyd silent and Jac miserable. Just as they rode into the ranch yard, the rain started to come down in big, fat drops.

It was while they were at dinner, with rain pounding on the windows, that Mrs. Clever said, suddenly:

"Land, Jac, I forgot to tell you! A letter come today from your dad. Kerry was in town and brought the mail out."

"A letter from dad?" Jac repeated.

There was a sudden, scared feeling around her heart. As if, somehow, that letter might be terribly important. As quickly as possible she finished her dinner and took the letter to her room.

It wasn't very long. It said briefly that he hoped she was getting along all right and wasn't feeling too badly toward him. It said that he was enclosing some mail that had come to her before she left, but seemed to have fallen behind the table. It looked important, so he was sending it on to her.

The envelope enclosed was addressed to her in a sprawling handwriting. One that sent her heart into a dull, terrific thudding. She ripped it open with fingers that shook, and read:

DARLING, SWEET JAC—

I suppose for the next few weeks you're going to hate me more than you ever hated anyone in your life. But please, darling, try to understand!

I saw your father this morning. He made me realize in a few brief words what a fool I've been. He made me see an entirely different Jac from the sweet you that I know. This other girl has had practically everything she ever thought she wanted. Clothes and airplanes and yachts and beauty parlors—I can't think of them fast enough. She's sweet, and she's spoiled by a stern old man who loves her, and she hasn't the faintest idea what roughing it means.

Jac, I can't ask you to share what I've got. You don't know what it is. Nothing much but acres of overgrown weeds and brush, and a house with a leaky roof, and a job taming colts for a big outfit in Montana. There wouldn't be any servants, and it would be horribly lonely for you. You'd hate it, and after a little you'd hate me, too.

A year from now, darling, I'll come for you. I'll have something better, then. Not what you're used to by a long shot, but better than I have now. Something fit to ask a girl to share with me.

Be angry if you want; you probably will be, anyway. But a week from now or a month from now, read this again. Please, Jac, do that. And then you'll see what I mean. If we hadn't lost our heads, if we'd been very sensibly engaged for a while like most folks, it would have ended the same way. It would have been a year before we could be together. I didn't stop to think of all that, that night.

So Jac, honey, just wait and pray. And remember, darling, I love you. And if you don't believe that, if you feel like sneering or something, just stop and try to imagine for a minute the hell I had to go through before I could decide to do this.

KERRY.

WHEN she had finished reading, she looked at the letter uncomprehendingly. When big things hit you, sometimes you can't grasp them right away. Then she read it over again, and this time she understood.

"Kerry," she whispered. "Kerry—*darling.*"

Her eyes had stars in them, her cheeks had a lovely flush when she finally folded the letter up and thrust it into the pocket of the brown linen dress she wore.

And then, because she was so crazily, deliriously happy, and because she was going to find Kerry, she powdered her nose and took extra special care with putting her lipstick on, and selected a crisp yellow handkerchief to stick perkily into her breast pocket.

But all the time she felt suspended in air. Kerry hadn't sold her out at all. He'd borrowed the money—*borrowed* it—to fix up his ranch for his bride.

She went into the living room with a sharp clipping of small high heels.

"Kerry's around somewhere, isn't he?" she asked, with what she hoped passed for casualness.

"Why, no, Jac, he ain't," Bill Clever said regretfully. "He brought the mail from town and went straight on to his place. He finished working for us two —three days ago, you know."

"Oh!" Disappointment washed a part of the joy from her face, but it couldn't touch the sparkle in her eyes. She hesitated, and then her chin lifted defiantly. "But I have to see him. It's very important. Maybe I could ride over."

Both the Clevers protested in one breath.

"You couldn't do that, Jac! Why, it's almost twenty miles. And it's raining pitchforks. You'd get lost in the dark."

"Well, then, let me use the car. I can't get lost in that, can I?"

It seemed that she couldn't, since the road went straight past Kerry's house. So Jac went back to her room to slip into a green sports coat with a deep collar, and a little green hat with a cocky feather. When she came out again, Boyd was waiting.

"I'll drive you over, Jac. You don't want to go chasing over strange roads at night."

"But—" It seemed too unfair that it should be Boyd who drove her to Kerry tonight.

He understood her hesitancy and smiled faintly.

"It's okay, Jac. I'll take you."

For an instant her hand touched his. "You're grand, Boyd."

He put her into the car and slid in beside her. A little later they were moving through the pouring rain, the windshield swipe humming busily.

They had to drive slowly because of the storm. It seemed to Jac, who was used to fast driving, that they were merely crawling. And finally, after a long time, the back wheel rutted into a boggy hole and spun there. When Boyd put on a spurt of gas, it merely whined around in the muck.

He was very thoughtful; his eyes narrowed as they rested on her.

"Seems we're stuck," he remarked, and there was a queer undercurrent in his voice.

"But what can we do? We must be miles from either ranch!"

"I'll scout around," he decided after a moment.

She watched him get out and disappear into the darkness. She felt baffled, angry. What rotten luck she was having!

Boyd came back and poked his head inside.

"There's a shack of sorts over here. I think it's what they call the north line camp. Come on, and we'll see if we can't get warmed up a bit. Maybe I can find a gunny sack to pull us out."

With a sigh she got out of the car and followed Boyd to the shack. A

stove, a table, a chair and a bunk seemed to be about all the furniture. A string of apple boxes against the wall formed cupboards. And a kerosene lamp gave out a steady, yellow flare.

Boyd lighted a fire with scraps from the woodbox, while Jac sat down at the table and rested her chin in one hand, disgustedly.

"You'd better hunt up that gunny sack," she said. "We've got to go on."

"What's the rush to see the Newton guy?"

"No rush at all!" Disappointment put an edge on her voice. "We can just as well wait until midnight!"

"Or daylight?"

Something tense, something strange in his voice made her lift her eyes swiftly. He was standing with his back to the stove, legs apart, hands in pockets. He moved forward, and she was reminded of the phrase, "panther tread."

"I hadn't figured on that hole out there, Jac, but it works just as well—maybe better. You see, we weren't going to Newton's ranch at all. We were going straight past it, and to town."

"But why?"

"To be married, my dear," Boyd said softly.

JAC rose slowly, half afraid. But she tried to laugh it off.

"Don't be silly, Boyd! I told you I couldn't marry you, and I can't."

"You mean that, don't you?"

"Of course I mean it. Please be reasonable, Boyd, and let's go on."

"Go on?" he repeated, laughing. "Oh, no, my dear! We don't go on. I happen to be quite fond of you, and also quite in debt. It'll be handy to have old Clive Lowell for a father-in-law. So we'll just stay where we are, and in the morning maybe you'll decide you would like to marry me, after all."

"Boyd, you can't do a thing like this!"

"No?"

She saw that talking wasn't any use at all. Nothing she could say would make any difference with him.

What a blind little fool she had been, not to see through his disappointed-lover rôle before! He'd probably been laughing at her all the while.

She stepped back in sudden panic when he moved toward her.

"Boyd!" she cried. "Boyd, listen to me! I didn't say I didn't want to marry you. I said I couldn't—and I can't! Because I'm already married. Kerry Newton is my husband!"

Boyd stared at her, his eyes growing harder and a dark flush rising to his cheeks. He looked suddenly like a total stranger.

"Why, you little—"

She took another step back, and it brought her against the wall. In a flash he had her in his arms, his face ugly with fury.

"So that's the racket! Kidding me along, and all the time behind my back you and this cowboy fellow—"

"Boyd," she whispered. *"Boyd!"*

She tried to fight, but she could not move in his arms. What was she going to do?

"All right," he said harshly, "I'll let you off on the marriage racket. But there are other ways of getting money, and I'm on the spot. Haley at the casino holds a note of mine, and he'd just as soon use me as an example to the rest of his suckers. I'm not anxious for lilies in my hand."

"I'll give you some money," she promised desperately. "I'll give you a check."

"Tomorrow is another day, and women change their minds. But I guess

your father and that slick cowboy husband of yours will be glad enough to pay, to keep things quiet."

"Kerry hasn't any money!" she cried wildly. "And dad would kill you first."

"Your dad's too smart to get himself hanged. And Kerry"—he sneered the name—"has plenty of money, don't you fear! He borrowed about thirty thousand dollars from a big loan syndicate the other day. He'll pay, all right."

"He borrowed—"

"Sure, he borrowed!" Boyd mocked. "Didn't he tell you? You haven't got him very well trained, if he holds out on you like that, Jac. Thirty grand, and little Boyd Laren is going to get his slice—in the morning."

She hardly heard him. She was sick with the shock and heartache of it. Thirty thousand dollars! He had been able to borrow that much. Then why—why had he let her father buy him off?

There was only one explanation. The ten thousand was just a little nest egg to stow away. An unexpected gift, that he had picked up on the side. And the letter he had written her was filled with lies!

She was jerked back to the present by Boyd's kiss upon her mouth. It made her so furious she could not speak. She beat her hands frantically against him. Panic grew in her heart. And then a curt voice spoke from the doorway.

"What's up?"

Boyd lifted his head, and Jac turned hers, a frantic plea in her eyes. It was Kerry!

Boyd released her abruptly, just in time to meet the lean body that leaped at him. He was an athlete, but he vastly underestimated Kerry's fury at finding Jac struggling in another man's arms.

Kerry practically mopped up the place with him, while Jac huddled against the wall and watched. And Boyd couldn't stand up to that sheer battery, trained though he was. He finally went down and stayed down. He wasn't out; he simply refused to get up and be pounded any more. Kerry prodded him with his toe.

"Come on, dude—get up!"

Boyd opened one eye long enough to take in the other's fiery bronze eyes and rumpled hair. Long enough to notice that Kerry's hands were still doubled fists, itching to get at him. Then he closed his eye again and did not stir.

Kerry picked him up and tossed him out into the rain. And then he picked up Jac as he would a doll, and carried her out and put her up on his horse. He vaulted up behind her and wrapped her tight against him under a big oilskin slicker. And he didn't say a word.

Jac didn't say anything, either. She was thrilled and breathless and a little scared. She had never seen Kerry on a rampage before. She'd never seen him fighting mad. His mouth was grim, and his eyes shot sparks, and his face was white under its tan.

Beneath her cheek she could feel his heart thudding, and his arms held her as if he expected her to be torn from him in another instant.

The horse carried them down the road and through an open gate into a yard. The silhouette of a big house loomed darkly, but there was no light in it anywhere.

"Why—" Jac began.

Then in a flash she knew. This wasn't Spanish Peak. It was Kerry's own ranch.

SHE trembled a little, but was silent when he lifted her down. He carried her, still wrapped in the slicker, up steps and across a porch.

He flung open a door, and a wave of warmth touched her. He set her on her feet.

"Just stand there a minute."

She heard him moving in the darkness, and then a lamp glowed on. She was standing in a big, warm, old-fashioned kitchen, looking at Kerry and wondering what to say. And he was looking at her with hot flames in his eyes.

"It's lucky I felt in the mood for riding around tonight," he said finally. "Rain or no rain."

There was no answer to that, so after a moment she unfastened the big brown buckle and three buttons on her coat, and shrugged it off.

Kerry stood looking at her, with half the room between them. His mouth looked straight and hard and determined.

"Jac, you're not so awfully smart. Maybe that's occurred to you, too. You can't go around all the time flirting with men and driving them crazy and not expect them to do something about it. Even now that Laren's out of the picture, I guess you know that half the men at Spanish Peak are crazy about you."

"But I've hardly looked at them!" she protested.

He went on as if she hadn't spoken at all. "I'm going to take care of you, Jac, from now on. I'm your husband, and I've got the right. I don't care if you do hate me, or if you married me just for the excitement. And wiring your dad won't do you any good, because he sent me this telegram today."

He picked it up, a yellow slip lying on the kitchen table, and gave it to her. It said:

DONT BELIEVE ALL JAC SAYS STOP WOMEN ARE LIKE THAT STOP USE YOUR HEAD AND GOOD LUCK SON STOP

CLIVE LOWELL

She stared at it a moment, then crushed it into an angry little ball.

"What does it mean?" she demanded whitely. "That all along you and dad have been playing basketball with me?"

"Jac, no! I sent his check back and told him why I couldn't keep it. And this was the reply I got."

She shrugged icily and dropped the telegram into the stove. She replaced the lid with a clatter. Then she wheeled furiously on him.

"And just what was the reason you couldn't keep that check, that made him wire an answer like that? I suppose you discussed me as you would a carload of wild bronchos that needed taming."

"You do need considerable taming," Kerry said thinly.

"Oh, I do, do I? Suppose you tell me what you wrote him, if you're not ashamed of it!"

Kerry's hands closed around her arms painfully. He was white, and a tiny muscle at the corner of his mouth twitched.

"Sure, I'll tell you," he grated. "I told him that I loved you, and that you were more important to me than any darned check or any ranch! I told him that you despised me, but that somehow I was going to take you off his hands permanently. I'm going to make you love me again, if it's the last thing I ever do."

"It'll be the last," she began furiously.

And then she stopped, the brilliant blue of her eyes blurring. She didn't want to quarrel with Kerry. She didn't want him to look at her as if he almost hated her.

"I can take care of you," he went on levelly. "I found out just lately about a ranch loan syndicate that would let me have the money to put the place on its feet again. It used to be the biggest ranch around when grandad had it, but dad sort of let it go to seed, and when I was big enough I never had enough money to fix it up.

"But I have, now. I'll stock it up and repair it and make it a leader again. It won't be any palace compared to your standards, but we'll have plumbing and electricity and money enough for anything you'd want, living way out here."

He was silent, looking down at her with eyes that were stern, but that adored her, too.

Jac moved faintly, her red lips parted. Her heart was beating suffocatingly.

"Kerry, don't quarrel," she whispered. "Kerry, I wish you'd kiss me."

In a flash he was holding her close. Kissing her crazily, passionately; kissing her until she was weak and shaky. And still he kept on kissing her, as if he had been starved for years and couldn't possibly get enough. As if he'd taken the check rein clear off his emotions.

"Jac! Jac, darling, you do love me! You don't hate me. You only said those things because you thought I'd let you down. Jac, didn't you?"

"Yes," she murmured, against his flaming lips. "I only said them. That letter you wrote didn't come until today, Kerry. It was in the one from dad that you brought out."

"Jac, your poor, darling little kid! I wrote it weeks ago. And all this time you must have thought— Honey, I'm not going to let you out of my sight again. Not ever. I love you so, little wife."

It was going to be sweet, being Kerry's wife. Having him love her and protect her and take care of her. For always, sweet—like this.

And Jac stretched up on tiptoe to meet that kiss halfway.

Next Week:

"YOUNG LOVE IN PARIS"

by May Christie

"You have read the letter, Miss Stevens," said Austin Jason. "Will you do as I ask?"

The Love Trap

By DOROTHY FLACK

She thought she would gladly pay any penalty for one stolen week in another woman's Paradise

SERENA STEVENS stared absently from the broad window that bore the name Jason and Burton Company. A window high up on the thirty-fifth floor of one of Manhattan's tallest downtown office buildings. She watched two small tugs busily maneuvering a liner into the center of the Hudson River, preparatory to heading her out toward the sea.

Serena sighed, and brushed a small hand over the prim part of her mouse-

"Yes, I'll do it," she said clearly. At least it would give her one week with the man she worshiped, under his roof as his wife.

colored hair. Her eyes, through their horn-rimmed spectacles, sought her typewriter—only to return to the vessel, now gliding majestically out of the harbor.

It was just such a luxury liner that had carried Vina Jason away. Vina, who had broken Serena's heart and did not know it to this day. For she had been Mrs. Austin Jason these last two aching years, and now she was on her way to England to fullfill a movie contract, leaving her husband to pursue his business career while she sought fresh laurels abroad.

In a vague way Serena was glad the other woman was gone. Not that the glorious Vina had ever intruded her presence upon her husband's secretary, but it was comforting to know that the

man she adored so hopelessly was not returning each evening to her rival's arms.

Serena was excruciatingly jealous of the love she bore Austin Jason. She had lived with it so long, thrilled to it and suffered with it. It was hers alone, cherished and harbored within her small tight chest; unshared; unsought. She hugged it to her in misery and silence, and the weight of it seemed to bruise her almost physically.

The door of the office opened, and a tall young man entered and dropped a sheaf of papers nonchalantly on her desk.

"Get these out as soon as you can, Miss Stevens," he said kindly. "They are important."

"As soon as I finish this order, Mr. Burton," she answered dutifully, not raising her eyes from her fingers that flashed to the typewriter at the sound of his entrance.

Serena always found cause to be busy when Robert Burton, the junior partner, was around. She disliked him intuitively, she told herself; but, had she been wholly truthful, she would have admitted that she disliked him particularly because he had entered the firm's partnership at the unhappiest time in all her desolate young life. That was when the screen idol, Vina Del Ray, had become the wife of her employer.

It wasn't so much that Austin Jason, who was ten years her senior, handsome and distinguished, would ever have given her so much as a glance. But it hurt so desperately to have her beloved idol become somebody else's property.

Of course she had wished him happiness with what she hoped was a happy smile, but in her heart she had felt, then and ever since, like the dog in the manger. And when in idle moments she wondered what Austin Jason would have thought, had he been aware of her passion, her timid soul shriveled in dread of his amused, astonished laughter.

As Serena ripped a sheet of typed paper from the machine before her, she glanced out of the corner of her cool gray eyes at Robert Burton. She could see into his office through the glass partition. Suddenly her casual glance became whole-hearted interest.

He was pacing the length of his cubicle with hectic strides, his athletic shoulders hunched, his bronzed fingers running through his thick dark hair in agitation. Never before had Serena seen so perplexed a frown on that carefree young face. For a moment she watched him, amused, and then returned to her work.

She finished his letters and took them to his office. He was sitting quietly enough now, tapping his pencil abstractedly on the top of his mahogany desk. He scarcely seemed aware of her as she entered.

"I guess they're all right. I won't bother to sign them now. Put them there." He indicated a letter basket with the tip of his pencil.

"But you said they were important, Mr. Burton," Serena put in efficiently, passing her hand over her brow as she characteristically did when annoyed or impatient.

As she did so, the fine edging on her lace cuff caught in her glasses. They fell to the floor with a small clatter.

Robert Burton leaped from his chair to recover them, but Serena, flushed with annoyance, was already holding the offending eyepiece in her hands.

The late afternoon sun poured over her small, slim figure in somber black,

relieved only by touches of old lace at the throat and wrists. It fell on her smooth, ash-blond hair, and lent sparkling life to the soft gray, unhappy eyes. Impatience at her own clumsiness gave her cheeks a rich color that no rouge had ever dared.

Robert Burton stood gazing down at her, wonder written in every line of his clean-cut countenance.

"Well, I'll be—" he ejaculated, staring in ill-concealed admiration.

Serena stared back in equal amazement. Her cheeks burned a deep crimson.

"The letters, Mr. Burton. You said they were important," she reminded him. Composure returned like a clean wave, washing her face clear again.

"Forget the letters, young lady, and come with me. I have an idea you are going to be a lifesaver to our friend, Jason."

His eyes twinkled as he looked at her, and a broad grin spread over his face.

Serena stared at him blankly, thinking absurdly what beautiful teeth he had. But what had he said about Austin? She could be a lifesaver to him?

"Well," she thought ruefully, "that's better than being nothing but an office fixture!"

Robert Burton, still smiling, snapped his fingers like a small boy.

"Yes, sir, I've got it! Come on, Miss Stevens. We haven't any time to lose."

He grabbed her by the arm and ushered her to his door through her own office at a marathon pace and into Austin Jason's inner sanctum.

The furrows of worry on the senior partner's brow deepened as his young partner and secretary entered.

Serena straightened her twisted sleeve and rubbed the arm that Robert had clutched, then started shakily to replace her glasses.

"Don't put them on, Miss Stevens!" Burton ordered crisply. "I want Mr. Jason to see what I mean."

The older man rose from his chair.

"May I ask the meaning of this, Robert? What has Miss Stevens done?"

"She hasn't done anything, but, boy, she's going to! And what a break for you! For Heaven's sake man, *look at her!*"

THE bewildered girl turned ashen white, as the man she loved bent his eyes, sharp as blue needle points, upon her.

He peered into her face in embarrassment, passing his hand across his wavy blond hair, already graying at the temples. A deep flush of anger spread over his face as he turned to Burton.

"Will you kindly tell me what this horseplay is about? You know I despise practical jokes."

The excited young man groaned loudly and clapped his hand to his head.

"Ye gods, man! Vina is your own wife, and you can't even see that this girl looks like her? Can't you see your blessed inheritance is saved?"

Austin Jason gave his secretary one disparaging glance and turned his head away, only to jerk his disbelieving gaze back to her small countenance in dawning wonder. Like a man just awakened, he turned to his partner.

"You're right, Rob, absolutely right!" He sat down in his chair, apparently overcome.

"But how is that going to help me?"

Serena stood gaping at them. Now that they had looked her over to their complete satisfaction, her presence was ignored. She stood wavering, irresolute.

Only one thing was real: Rob Burton's triumphant, excited voice.

"Help you?" he exploded. "Your wife is on the high seas, isn't she? And you have to have a flesh-and-blood wife when that old crab of an uncle arrives, don't you?"

He paused impressively, giving his words a chance to sink in.

"Well, *there she is!*"

Before either of his listeners could speak, he rushed on:

"Of course she isn't nearly as beautiful—I beg pardon, Miss Stevens. Her hair isn't the right shade, and she is much thinner. But, Lord, Austin, you *must* see there's a likeness. And with fixing up— Besides, all movie stars look a bit different in real life from what you expect."

Were they both mad, or just she? What was all this about? Serena's lips quivered, and then set in a hard little line as she heard her lack of charms so candidly discussed.

No wonder she had never liked Robert Burton. Now she could find it in her heart to hate him. She knew she was no raving beauty, but he didn't have to humiliate her, and before Mr. Jason, too.

Tears stung the back of her eyes, but proudly she held them back. She clutched the side of the desk. They might at least ask her to sit down and tell her what it was all about.

As if he had read her thoughts, Austin Jason indicated a chair, his eyes still focused upon her face. Serena sank into it, feeling more confused than she ever had been in her life.

"I owe you an apology and an explanation, Miss Stevens. Mr. Burton should have discussed this matter with me before dragging you in so abruptly. I ask your forgiveness for both of us."

He paused a moment and selected a letter from a file on his desk.

Serena was acutely conscious of Robert Burton standing a little to the side, a grin lighting his face.

"He," she thought, "is having a swell time, anyway—at my expense."

"This is entirely a family matter, Miss Stevens," Austin Jason went on. "But it is one of immediate importance, and I am inclined to accept Mr. Burton's suggestion, if you don't mind helping me carry it through."

He coughed nervously and hesitated. "I will consider it a great personal favor if you will. Besides, I know how trustworthy you are, and that you will hold this matter in strictest confidence."

Serena's head drooped, and she flushed happily at the words of praise, but his next words chilled her heart.

"Of course I will make this—er—favor well worth your while."

Humiliated, Serena did not raise her eyes. She felt like shouting that she would do anything—anything to help him. But, oh, she wished he hadn't offered her money!

Her employer shoved the letter he had been holding into her hands.

"Here, read this. It will explain far better than I can. You know, of course, that my wife has sailed for Europe."

Serena accepted the letter timidly. The trade name of the famous mid-Western packing house was blazoned across the top of the stationery. With mingled awe and eagerness she read:

MY DEAR NEPHEW:

It is useless to remind you of my extreme displeasure when you wrote me of your marriage to the notorious Vina Del Ray, two years ago.

Your caustic letter in reply to mine, by no means altered my estimation of the union.

The fact that she is the daughter of my ancient business rival, Alexander Del Ray, has nothing whatever to do, as you so impertinently suggested, with my opinion. She is an actress,

and our family has never tolerated one of that profession.

However, I am now an old man, and it is my desire to die at peace with my family.

It is my wish to spend a week in your home. If, upon making your wife's acquaintance, I feel that you have not lowered the traditions of our family, it is my intention to reinstate your name in my will.

I will have you know, sir, that only my son's untimely death, and the memory of your father, precipitated this decision.

Sincerely,

CHALMERS JASON.

SERENA looked up from the sheet, and for a moment no one in the room spoke. Both men watched her intently.

"I want you to pose as my wife, to stay in my home, Miss Stevens, during my uncle's stay with me," Austin Jason broke the silence, choosing his words carefully. "It is not a deception unworthy of you; you know my wife, her character. It is, in a way, scarcely a deception at all."

Serena nodded without answering. The romance written between the lines, as though by the invisible hand of time, entranced her. She saw, in her imagination, an indomitable old man, bent by the blow dealt his proud, if antiquated, conceptions of family duty. A favorite nephew, married to the daughter of the enemy of his youth, and that daughter of a profession that his puritanical generation abhorred.

She thought of the death of the proud man's son, and understood the softening that only suffering and the long trail of years can bring; the final yearning to bestow his earth's possessions where his heart commanded. This, then, was what the man she loved asked her to do for him: restore his wife by proxy, that he might eventually lay at her feet still more of this world's goods.

All this flashed through Serena's mind in a second, and more. Fame and beauty, applause and wealth were Vina Jason's. And—much more—Austin Jason's love.

And for her? One week with the man she worshiped, under his roof as his wife—unloved, uncherished.

"Are you going to do it, Miss Stevens?"

It was Robert Burton's voice speaking. He was leaning toward her, a strange expression on his face.

She turned from him to meet her employer's questioning gaze.

"Yes, I'll do it," she said clearly, surprised at the determination in her own voice.

"Good," sighed Austin Jason as though a great weight had been lifted from him. "I can't express my gratitude. I know my wife will be as thankful as I am, when she knows."

"That's mighty fine of you, Miss Stevens! Darned sporting, I'd say. You know, I feel rather responsible for all this, since it was my fool idea."

Serena smiled up at Robert Burton as he spoke. Somehow, for all his cheeriness, his voice lacked conviction. He had been so eager before. Did he think she couldn't carry it through?

Austin Jason was taking his check book from the desk drawer as casually as though about to pay off a day laborer. Robert Burton watched him, his face suddenly alert and thoughtful.

"Perhaps Miss Stevens would like some sort of written statement, relieving her of any personal responsibility," he suggested affably.

"Oh, no!" Serena's white face flushed scarlet. "I—really—"

"I can't see that that is necessary, Robert. There will be no personalities involved," replied Jason without looking up.

The hot blood flowed away from

Serena's cheeks. A cold-blooded business proposition; that was all it was. Well, she'd treat it as such.

What would have been written on that contract, she wondered, had it been drawn? "I, Austin Jason, do hereby and in the presence of this witness, release Serena Stevens of all responsibility of willfully breaking her heart for the sum of—"

A sob rose and caught in the girl's slender throat. Austin Jason was handing her the check. She had not meant to take it until Robert Burton, suggesting that release, had impressed upon her the businesslike nature of the transaction. She thrust it now into her purse with shaking hands, and rose.

"My uncle arrives at Newark airport at five tomorrow," Austin Jason told her. "We should be at my apartment by six. I will instruct my servants accordingly. You need not be embarrassed; they are discreet and trustworthy. My housekeeper, Mrs. Temple, will take care of your personal needs, and I think the check will cover any expenditures you find necessary.

"Please dress for dinner. I am sure any of my wife's clothes will fit you, as you are about the same size."

Austin Jason ran his hand over his chin and looked down at her quizzically. A slow smile spread over his face, and his eyes narrowed imperceptibly.

"I hope you prove a good actress, and kindly make an effort to act affectionately toward me."

He dropped his gaze and studied the polished surface of his desk thoughtfully. At last he looked up and flashed a winning smile at the girl before him.

"Well, I guess that's all. The rest is up to you."

Serena made a dash for the door. Make an effort to act affectionately toward him! When her heart had lain in pieces, broken of love for him, for two long years.

She closed the door softly and stood looking at the familiar office as though she had never seen it before. She glanced at the clock. Half an hour before closing time.

Resolutely she covered the typewriter and took her plain coat from the closet. Before the tiny mirror she smoothed her colorless hair and stared at herself reflectively.

She put her hands to her eyes. She had left her glasses on Austin Jason's desk. Well, she would not need them in her new rôle.

As she left the cloak room, her small, unbecoming felt hat pulled well down over her wan face, she nearly bumped into Robert Burton.

"Buck up, Miss Stevens!" he said heartily. "It's not going to be too much of an ordeal. Austin, I know, will do everything possible to make it easy for you. And I'll turn up whenever I can, to lend moral support."

Serena looked up into his confident, smiling face, and her own lips turned to ice.

"I'm sure you'll be a *great* help," she said as she departed.

The young man stood watching her until the clanging elevator door shut out her slimness. His eyes were alive with reluctant admiration as he turned back to his office.

SERENA caught an uptown bus and sat gazing out at the throng of homeward-bound workers with unseeing eyes. Her heart was a seething cauldron. Austin Jason—her Austin, whose image she had hugged to her breast all these long months—was to be hers for a week. The thought drew the breath shuddering from her body and left her weak with ecstasy.

"Am I all right?" she asked in a hushed, happy voice. "Do I look enough like Vina?"
"You've worked miracles," Robert told her. "But—oh, my dear, where have you lost yourself?"

She shut from her mind the ugly word "proxy." She would be in his home when he returned, weary from a long day at the office.

Perhaps at the end of the week he would reward her by telling her that she was a good little actress the way one pats a faithful dog and says, "Good old Rover."

A sorrowful smile curled the corners of her shell-pink mouth. She clenched her primly gloved hands together and reminded herself that this was a business deal.

Her thoughts turned to Robert Burton, then, and her chin set firmly.

At a corner of Broadway and the Eighties, Serena left the bus. There were plenty of beauty shops open all night in the section where she lived. She purchased a movie magazine from a corner stall and turned its pages.

At last she found what she wanted, a good picture of Vina, and stepped into a hairdresser's. She gave the awed operator her instructions, and then put herself in the girl's skilled hands.

AT precisely five forty-five the next day, the chimes at the outer door of the Jason apartment, on upper Park Avenue, pealed musically.

The slim, golden-haired girl in the drawing-room halted on silver-shod feet, and stood rigid. A bowl of fragrant white roses, which she had been about to set down, shook dangerously in her jeweled hands.

"Mr. Burton, madame," the suave butler announced. And Robert Burton, handsome and faultlessly groomed, brushed past him.

The room was candle lit and its soft richness was a foil of priceless beauty for the lovely woman who extended her hand in trembling graciousness toward her guest.

"Are they here yet, Miss Stevens?" he asked as he crossed the room to her side.

Then he gasped as he drew closer to her and took her hands in both his own. "Good Lord!" he whispered. "It can't be you!"

Serena looked up at him provocatively, her head tilted to one side, in a pose the absent Vina affected before the camera. Her bright gold hair shone like an aura about her small, proud head.

"Am I all right?" she asked in a hushed, happy voice, the blood rushing to her cheeks under his intense scrutiny.

"You — you're wonderful," he breathed. "So like her, but so different —so very different." He hesitated, seeking words, his dark eyes lost in hers.

Serena turned away, and a smile flitted across her rouged lips. She was grateful, of course, for Robert's assurance, but he really didn't count. It was Austin, her "husband," who must set the seal of approval upon her masquerade.

Her soft mouth quivered. Her ears strained to catch the first sound of his voice; his first footfall, as he entered the apartment. She shook herself, mentally, and warned her fast-beating heart to remember that she was living in another woman's Paradise.

Suddenly the lights flashed on, flooding the room with brilliance. She turned angrily to confront Robert, his hand still on the electric light switch.

"I didn't mean to startle you, Serena," he said, using her Christian name for the first time, "but it just occurred to me—that Austin's uncle is a very old man, and he won't want subdued lights. I wonder if your make-up isn't a bit too heavy. Remember, you should look definitely untheatrical to achieve your purpose. You must impress the old man with your gentility, even though you are an actress—or supposed to be."

He smiled at her apologetically. "You have worked miracles, and your hair might be Vina's own, but your lips, your eyes— Oh, dear, where have you lost yourself?"

Serena looked up at him in humiliation and astonishment. At his last words, her eyes filled with tears, and she put one exquisitely manicured hand to her throat. Tenderness in this man's voice? In his eyes? Tenderness for little, drab Serena Stevens, whom she had audaciously murdered yesterday in a beauty shop?

Serena could not tear her eyes away from Robert Burton's face. He stood, self-conscious and silent, his strong mouth drawn into a firm line. She sensed at once that he regretted his outburst; nevertheless, something warm tugged gently in her heart.

But only for a moment.

"Why," she thought piteously, "couldn't it be Austin who stands looking at me like that?"

In her heart, Serena had never questioned her love for Austin Jason. Clean

and still as a virgin lake, it had lain there, unruffled by any knowledge or response on his part. Her love was a bitter-sweet draught, raised to her lips alone.

Little did she realize that, to share it with the man she loved—another woman's husband — would sully those clear waters past repair.

"I've hurt your feelings," Robert said contritely. "But you understand, don't you?"

"Yes—yes, of course," she murmured hastily. "I'll try to fix it, if you'll pardon me."

WHEN Serena, pale but lovelier than ever, reëntered the room, Austin Jason was bending over the great chair near the fireplace, carefully lighting a cigar for an old man.

Timidly she approached them. Austin turned quickly and came to her side. Putting an affectionate arm about her, he kissed her cheek and drew her further into the room.

If her appearance astounded him, he gave no outward sign of emotion. Serena hoped with all her heart that she showed none, either. For the dim room had careened madly at that casual caress, and only Chalmers Jason's amazingly bright eyes, beneath their beetling white brows, restored her wavering senses.

She held out a timid hand to the old man, who accepted it formally and regarded her with piercing interest.

She spoke at once of his trip, and of his bravery in attempting it by air, suggesting that he must be weary indeed. With wifely authority she brushed Austin aside and took the formidable uncle to his rooms, charmingly solicitous of his comfort. She returned to the drawing-room and sank into a low chair beside the fire.

Austin bent over her solicitously.

"You are doing superbly, Miss Stevens," he said. "Remember this first meeting is the hardest, and I think you have captivated him already."

He straightened, and looked down at her appraisingly.

"Of course you don't really look like Vina, but you are a startling imitation. It's your hair, I think, that's done it. That style of hers is so distinctive—and mighty becoming to you, I might say.

"And since you are now one of the family," he laughed, "I might add that it takes very little effort to imagine you as my wife."

His blue eyes traveled boldly over her, from the tips of her silver toes to her golden head.

Serena looked up at him, startled. Surely he was joking.

She glanced furtively at Robert. Had he heard? A painful flush stained her cheeks as she saw him regarding the older man's back with dark annoyance.

"Don't look so embarrassed," Austin laughed easily. "My dear child, just relax and feel at home. It *is* your home, you know."

Serena tried, but something was marred. Something beautiful and rare that had lain in her heart, those two long years. She tried, impatiently, to push his words from her mind, and at last she forgot them completely as the evening progressed.

Once again she was lost in the meshes of her love, as she watched Austin's gentle consideration of his old uncle; his graciousness as host and master of his home.

Serena felt that she had never spent so lovely an evening as she watched the old gentleman's prejudices toward herself evaporate like mists before the sun. He watched Austin's affectionate

attentions to her avidly, and she knew that her pseudo-husband's future fortunes were safe.

Serena's smooth brow clouded as she thought of the reason of her being here. Was it so honorable, after all? Was Austin calculatingly charming to the old gentleman for the promised inheritance alone? If Chalmers Jason had been a penniless old relative sitting there, would Austin have treated him the same?

She had felt so loyal, so full of happiness in doing this favor for her beloved employer and now, ugly thoughts were popping out their snakelike heads on her very first night under his roof.

Suddenly Serena looked up, conscious of Robert Burton's gaze upon her. His seeking eyes seemed to burn themselves into her own, welding their thoughts across the space of the room.

An ormolu clock above the fireplace struck eleven. She rose from her chair and, pleading weariness, crossed to Chalmers Jason to bid him good night. The old gentleman rose with dignity and kissed her lightly on the forehead. A sign of forgiveness, she knew, to his nephew.

A lump rose unbidden to Serena's throat as she looked into the kindly, bright eyes. She had no right to be here; to know these things.

As she said good night to Robert Burton, his warm hand clasp comforted her. She thought grimly of what he had said yesterday in the office about being "moral support" for her. She was certainly proving a weakling, for she felt she needed every ounce of it that he could spare her.

Austin escorted her to her room and held the door open for her. He murmured something about pleasant dreams and then, looking down into her upturned face, winked broadly.

If he had put out his hand and slapped her, she could not have been more shocked, more hurt. She shut the door softly and leaned against its mirrored side, feeling as though the very floor quaked beneath her. Could the man whom she had worshiped have done that thing? Winked at her like an accomplice, gloatingly, because together they had succeeeded in tricking an old man?

Surely—surely she had dreamed it! To help Austin to something that was rightfully his own, by birth and heritage, was one thing, but to take part in a tawdry farce was quite another.

She was ready for bed, and clad in one of Vina's gorgeous negligees, before she noticed the radiogram, propped against the mirror on her dressing table. She picked it up thoughtfully. Across the face of the envelope were scrawled a few hasty words in Austin's writing:

Thought you would feel better if you read this. A. J.

For a moment she studied the bold characters, and then reluctantly drew the message from its already opened envelope. She read:

Congratulations on your scheme. Go to it with my blessings. Love,

VINA.

Serena reread the terse message and laid it down gingerly.

It should be reassuring to know that Austin's wife approved of their joint deception. But was it? Somehow it wasn't wholly satisfying to the tired, befuddled girl who curled up in the actress' bed.

BUT the days that followed were sheer enchantment for Serena.

She stood in her elaborate dressing room, a small, gold-framed calendar

in her hand. Jealously she had ticked off each departing day of this glorious week.

Her forehead puckered in an unhappy frown as she gazed down at it now, pencil in hand. Only two more left, then Uncle Chalmers would be leaving; satisfied, she knew, to leave his great wealth in the hands of his nephew and his "wife."

She sighed deeply and clutched the little calendar to her breast. Bright tears ran unchecked down her cheeks.

Two more days in which to do all the loving, small services that had given her such joy. Two fleeting days to feel Austin's tender kiss upon her cheek morning and evening; to minister to the wants of the old man of whom she had grown genuinely fond.

For on the morning after she had read Vina Jason's telegram, she had tossed all her doubts aside, and thrown herself heart and soul into the perfection of her rôle; the rôle of the wife she longed to be. Never had Serena Stevens ever dreamed that life could be so gay, so glamorous.

Robert Burton had been a constant guest in the Jason household. His charm and wit had irresistibly won Chalmer Jason's interest. And if the old man's eagle eyes had followed his actions with relentless curiosity, Serena had not been aware of it.

A tap came at Serena's door. The prim housekeeper stood in the doorway, a long flower box in her hands.

"Put them in the drawing-room, Mrs. Temple," Serena said. "I'll arrange them there, so that I can be with Uncle Chalmers."

The old man looked up from his newspaper with an affectionate greeting, as she entered the room. She chose a tall silver vase and began to arrange the fragrant red roses.

"Austin is certainly a thoughtful husband, my dear. It isn't every wife that receives such posies every day."

Serena turned to him, a nervous laugh rising to her lips.

"But, Uncle Chalmers, they're not from Austin. Rob Burton sent them. Aren't they lovely?"

The old man's leonine head nodded assent, but his lips set soberly as he regarded her flushed, happy face through narrowed eyes.

"Of course," he said quietly, leaning forward a bit in his chair. "I am too old to understand modern ways, but it seems to me, if I were my nephew, I would not be made exactly happy by such daily offerings."

A look of pained surprise altered Serena's countenance. Her heart gave a queer, foreboding jerk, and her busy hands faltered among the blooms.

"But he is such a close friend, uncle."

"He is, indeed," agreed the old man as he carefully folded the newspaper across his knees. "Too close, I should say, for comfort."

Serena's white teeth caught her lower lip, but she did not answer. A worried line crept between her drawn brows.

NOT until two o'clock the next morning did Serena enter her room to retire. It had been an exciting evening. The show they had seen had been perfect, and the glamorous night club they had visited afterward was something Serena had never hoped to see.

The old man had sat alone at their table in complete contentment, as she and Austin danced to the voluptuous music the famous restaurant featured. Her only fear was that, in trying to entertain his uncle, her "husband" had set too lively a pace.

She heard Austin moving about on the other side of her dressing room door now; the door that had been locked since her arrival. Her heart throbbed painfully at the thought of him, so near, so dear; still worlds away.

Serena sat before her dressing table in her light negligee; eyes dreaming, heart yearning. Her small hand rose gently to her cheek where his kiss had lingered but a little while before.

He had drawn her close to him, and his hands had trailed caressingly along her bare arms as he whispered good night. Small thrills of delight ran down her spine at the memory.

Dead quiet pervaded the apartment. Serena smiled thoughtfully as she brushed her hair into a shimmering cloud about her head. Uncle Chalmers, she guessed, had lost no time in seeking his slumber. She no longer heard footfalls on the other side of the door.

She had put out all the lights in the room, save one beside the bed. She threw off her negligee and slid between the soft silken sheets, snuggled deep under their caressing folds—and then sat bolt upright, her mind suddenly alert. Had she imagined, or had she heard, a slight knock?

She leaped from the bed and, trembling, drew the negligee about her again. She stood poised in the semi-darkness, straining her ears to catch the slightest sound.

Then it came again, a little louder. Her cold hands flew to her breast. She stood, a silver statue, the moonshine bathing her in an unearthly light.

"Serena." The voice, Austin's voice, came lightly through the paneled door that separated their rooms. She moved slowly toward it, as one in a dream.

"Are you still awake, Serena?"

"Yes," she answered in a stifled whisper. "Is anything wrong?"

Silence, h e a v y with unspoken thoughts, filled the room. She was at the door now, bending her ear to catch his every word.

"No. Nothing is wrong, dear," he said at last. "But I want to talk to you, alone. I *must*, Serena. May I come in?"

The muscles about the girl's tense mouth quivered. Torn with sudden desire to yield to his wish, she struggled with her emotions for one swift moment before replying.

"No—no, Austin, you mustn't!" she whispered, a note of hysteria creeping into her soft voice.

"For just a moment, Serena, I beg of you. Tomorrow is the last day I can keep you here, like this. Darling, I beg of you!"

The misery in his voice melted Serena. So he did love her, after all. A great sob rose in her throat at the hopelessness of it. Somehow her pain was worse, far worse, knowing that he suffered, too.

She raised her arms against the door as though embracing the man on the other side of it. Hot tears of shame and longing crept in slow tides down her tragic face.

"Serena, y o u ' r e crying!" His shocked cry came to her with a ringing undertone of triumph.

Suddenly the earth gave way. The door swung gently inward. Serena clung trembling in Austin's arms.

Hungrily he pressed her softly clad body to him. In the silence of the moon-dappled room, his lips sought hers passionately. Unresisting, blindly, Serena yielded to his ardor, and in that mad moment the searching moonbeams lured her senses out the window.

Austin Jason was a lost man. Gently, firmly holding in his embrace the fainting girl, he drew her further into his room.

Then suddenly the silence was shattered, the spell destroyed. A loud, agitated knock reverberated on Austin's door.

Serena felt her lover's body go rigid. His arms fell from her. Weak with horror, she fell back, a crumpled heap upon his bed. A wave of burning shame gripped her soul, and she cowered, stricken, as Jason clipped on the

Suddenly it was all too much for Serena. "Wife!" she fairly shrieked. "I'm no more your wife than—"

light and flung open the door, revealing her defenseless, to the eyes of his manservant.

"It's Mr. Jason, sir, your uncle. Mrs. Temple heard him groaning. It's some kind of an attack, sir."

"Call a doctor at once! I'll go to him."

And Austin rushed from the room without a backward glance.

The man gave Serena one flitting glance of disdain and turned swiftly away.

Serena fled to her room, her trembling hands over her ashen face. Shaken to the soul, she flung herself across the bed, dry sobs racking her frail body.

From the dressing table, the face of Vina Jason smiled at her out of a jeweled frame with veiled, sophisticated eyes.

SEVERAL days passed before Chalmers Jason recovered from his slight heart attack sufficiently to sit, propped up with pillows, in a chair in the drawing-room. Serena went about the business of nursing him with gentle, sad-eyed thoughtfulness.

He watched her incessantly and when her back was turned his old eyes lost their bright cheerfulness, and a perplexed frown drew his bushy brow into a straight line.

Serena was reading to him, late one afternoon, sitting on a low stool at his feet. She looked up unexpectedly as she turned a page, and caught his unguarded, troubled gaze upon her.

"Why, Uncle Chalmers!" she said in quick concern, putting her hand on his knee affectionately. "Don't you feel well?"

"I feel as well as an old fellow like me usually does, dear child," he answered gently. "It is you I'm worried about. You don't look as well as when I came. You have circles under those pretty eyes of yours." He hesitated, searching her face keenly. "I suspect you and that nephew of mine have been quarreling lately."

Serena dropped her eyes in confusion. How could she tell this dear old man that her tears flowed constantly; not outwardly, but in her heart? That the days she had so reluctantly ticked off on the gold-framed calendar now dragged by on misery-shod feet?

That the man whom her untutored heart had loved had betrayed her by his illicit desire; had dropped her after consuming her first passion; and left her nailed to the merciless scorn of his servants? That the sweetness he had found on her lips had turned to bitterest gall, and she now despised the man who posed as her husband?

Could she tell the gentle-faced inquisitor bending above her that she was a wife, bought and paid for by the hour? That the luxurious home she had entered with such a light and happy heart had become a prison to her?

No. For if she told the whole bitter truth, she knew it would only shatter the life of the old man she had learned to love.

"There isn't anything wrong," she said at length, in a low voice, a brave smile turning up the corner of her lips. "Austin has been dreadfully busy, and working nights. That is why he hasn't been at home so much."

"Funny," interrupted Chalmers Jason, screwing his eyes up and raising his chin reflectively, "that young Burton doesn't stay at the office later, then, and give him a hand. He seems to have plenty of leisure."

Serena flushed scarlet. It was true. Robert Burton had scarcely missed an evening at the apartment during the old man's illness and recuperation. She had

welcomed his presence casually, too absorbed with her own problem to see the hungry look his eyes held when he gazed upon her.

Sometimes he was moody and restless. But who wasn't in this house? The prolonged situation was getting on everybody's nerves. Still she dared not leave.

Austin and she had had an unpleasant scene when he tried to resume their broken idyl, and again when he had shown her a second wire from Vina, advising him to keep her proxy on at any cost, until Chalmers Jason's departure.

Serena's tense nerves had cracked, then. She had torn the uncashed check that he had given her, in tiny pieces, and flung it into his face. Then she had rushed to her room, aflame with indignation.

Since then she had seen him only when it was absolutely necessary.

Chalmers Jason rubbed his chin thoughtfully and said he believed he was tired. Serena closed the book with gratitude and assisted the old man from the room.

AUSTIN telephoned that day that he would not be home for dinner. Serena breathed a sigh of relief as she hung up the receiver. Her hurt heart still vibrated with misery at the sound of his voice.

She wandered aimlessly about the large drawing-room, touching this and that, rearranging Burton's flowers, in melancholy silence. At last she seated herself before the open fireplace and stared into the embers.

Robert Burton, entering quietly, found her there, alone. He came quickly and sat beside her, taking her cold hands into his own.

"Serena," he said softly, "Austin has to do something about this, and do it quickly. He's got to get you out of this mess, or you'll be ill with worry."

She glanced up at him gratefully. His dark, troubled eyes held hers, and a quick sob, that she tried desperately to stifle, broke from her lips. She tortured the wisp of handkerchief in her hands until it was in shreds.

"Oh, my dear!" Robert's voice, deep with pity, fell on her ears like balm. "Can you ever forgive me for what I have done to you, getting you into this? If I could only have guessed what would happen! I never dreamed that you loved Austin, But you do. Serena, darling, you *do*, don't you?"

His voice had risen, now, on a note of anguish. He took her by the shoulders and turned her to him almost roughly.

She looked up at him, speechless, and he thought he read his answer in her haunted eyes. He took his hands from her shoulders and began pacing the room in long strides, his hands thrust deep into the pockets of his coat. He turned back to where she sat, head bowed, and stood over her, unable to find words of comfort.

Then suddenly she burst into tears. Robert Burton looked at her helplessly for a moment, then very gently drew her to her feet. Without a word he put his arms around her. Her head drooped to his shoulder, and she clung to him like a wounded child.

"Cry it out, dear," he advised softly.

But suddenly she was not crying. She looked up into his face, blue eyes wide with self-revelation. A new warmth, new strength flooded her being. Her arms reached up timidly about his neck, and her shadowed eyes shone with a new glory as he bent his head to meet her lips.

For a long moment they stood there,

and an unseen light seemed to shed its radiance over them, penetrating and healing Serena's bruised heart.

She knew suddenly that *this* was love; holy and miraculously sweet. She knew that, like a lone wanderer, she had been following the mirage of her infatuation for Austin, until it had vanished and left her alone, stranded in a morass of shifting doubts and fears.

"Serena, beloved, is it true?" Robert whispered at last.

"Yes. Oh, yes," she answered breathlessly. "I do love you—I have been such a fool—such a blind fool."

"Don't say any more, darling. It is enough that you love me. Oh, my dear, I have been nearly mad, with you here, trapped in this place. I couldn't bring myself to speak before, but I love you—I worship you. You've got to come away with me and end this farce, once and for all!"

His deep, urgent voice lit new fires of hope in Serena, as she rested against him. Neither heard the soft, shuffling footsteps behind them.

"Farce? Trapped in this house? Mr. Burton, be so good as to tell me the meaning of this!"

THE lovers swung around, consternation painting their faces with guilt.

Chalmers Jason stood before them, his aged body drawn to its full height, trembling with rage.

Serena fell back, and a swift cry escaped her lips. The old man was facing her now, dark accusation written on every feature of his deeply lined face.

"I had suspected as much," he said in a voice, high and thin with anger. "Your crying spells. Your restlessness. It is a good thing my illness kept me here, or I should never have learned the truth."

He turned swiftly to Robert, who faced the old man's fury, outwardly calm.

"As for you, young man, don't look for your hat. You will stay here and answer to her husband!"

"Very well, sir," Robert Burton answered respectfully. "I shall be glad to. You see, I love her."

He sat down quietly, as though preparing for a long wait and carefully selected a cigarette from his case.

"Love! Bah!" retorted Chalmers Jason, and started toward his room, his cane thumping the carpet with venom.

Serena hastened to his side to support him, but he brushed her away with one withering look.

They heard the dull thud of his door as it closed behind his outraged figure. Serena rushed to Robert's side as though for protection, from what she did not know. He put his arms out to receive her, only to drop them at the sound of a man's voice in the hall.

Serena's startled glance flew to the doorway as Austin entered the room, a large confectioner's box in his hands.

"I didn't think I could make it for dinner," he said half apologetically to Serena, as he handed her the sweets.

His steel blue eyes turned questioningly to Robert, standing aloof, gazing darkly into the fireplace.

"What's the matter with you two?" he asked lightly. "What has happened?"

Serena's eyes trailed guiltily from one to the other. A nervous weakness overcame her. How could she tell Austin that their well-planned plot had proved a boomerang? That Chalmers Jason thought her an unfaithful wife, carrying on an affair under her husband's roof?

Courage drained from her as she faced her employer's ominous, ques-

tioning gaze. And then a hysterical desire to escape conquered her, and she fled to her room.

For what seemed hours, Serena sat quaking in silence. The two men's voices came to her, but she made no effort to listen to their conversation.

She rose at last to shut the door of her room, which in her haste she had left ajar. She supposed Robert was telling Austin the whole miserable story. What, she wondered, would they do now?

A warm flush stole over her slender body; ecstasy gripped her at the thought of Robert. Would he tell Austin, as he had told her, that he loved her? Would he take her away from here at once?

She hoped—oh, she hoped with all her heart, that they would tell Chalmers Jason the whole, despicable truth.

Serena's hand was on the doorknob when she heard a groan escape Robert's lips. She started toward the living room and then stood stockstill in the threshold, tense, listening.

"By Heaven, Austin, you will have to prove what you are saying. I've a good mind to throttle you!"

She saw Robert advance, his fists clenched, about to put words into action. But the older man stepped aside, narrowly averting the blow.

"Hold on, Robert," he commanded, his face flushed with anger. "I *can* prove it—by her own lips, if you want that. Ask her to deny that she was in my room at three o'clock, the morning my uncle was stricken."

AN inarticulate cry rose from Serena's constricted throat, but the two men, passionately engrossed in their argument, did not hear her. She stood frozen with horror, watching them, unable to command her limbs to move, unable to defend herself.

"What did you expect of a cheap office girl, suddenly thrown into an environment like this?" Austin was sneering. "Of course, old man, if you want to carry out your quixotic notions, it's your funeral, but I'd suggest you find yourself a more suitable wife. Unless you have no aversion to marrying another man's mist—"

Sickened, Serena turned away; there was a dull thud, but she did not hear it. She closed the door carefully, and staggered to her room, to the closet where her plain black dress and coat still hung.

She was not conscious of pain. Of anything at all. Her head felt strangely light, and when she put her hand to her forehead it felt like that of another person, wholly apart from herself. Surely someone else in the room was making those little, strangled noises.

She changed her dress, then pulled her black hat over her fair curls, and started out.

She had thought the drawing-room was empty, now, but as she passed the doorway, a voice, sullen with impatience, boomed at her. In the dim light she saw Austin sitting at the fireside, nursing a cut above one swollen eye.

"Serena," he said peremptorily, "where are you going?"

She clutched her small purse in white, tense hands and raised expressionless blue eyes to his.

"I'm going out," she answered shortly.

"My dear," he said, rising and coming toward her, "don't let what happened this afternoon distress you. Go back to your room and change your dress. Robert told me all about it, and I have just talked to Uncle Chalmers.

I'm sure I have convinced him that Burton's attentions were pressed upon you against your will."

A light broke through Serena's dazed mind. She saw clearly that Austin was playing his cards fast and furiously. That he meant to try to keep her here, his prisoner.

"Perhaps with the hope," she thought wildly, "of making me truly his mistress."

When had he had the opportunity to persuade his uncle? It had taken her only a few seconds to change her dress.

She looked at him, stark hatred staring out of her drawn face. She knew that he was simply exposing his whole campaign, not knowing that she had heard the lies he'd branded on the soul of the man she loved.

He had her in his arms now, pleading with her.

"Serena—Serena, don't go! I can fix it all up. It means so much to me. It isn't the money alone, my dearest. Don't you see that I'm mad about you? That I want you for my own. I can't give you up. I'll take care of you, little sweetheart. I'll give you anything in the world you want. I—"

A wave of faintness very nearly engulfed Serena. She tore herself free of his arms and stood, a tragic ghost, confronting him.

"I am leaving this house," she said in a low, deadly voice. "I never, as long as I live, want to see you again!"

Austin sprang toward her, but when the heavy silence of the room was broken, it was not by his voice.

"You had better let her go, my boy. A woman who would deceive you once will do it again."

Chalmers Jason advanced toward them, leaning heavily upon his gold-topped cane. His eyes bored into Serena's with undisguised hatred.

"I knew when you married this woman, no good could come of it. *An actress!* Let her go, I say. A good actress she is, I admit that. I never could have believed her treachery, had I not seen it with my own eyes."

In the midst of her distress, Serena found compassion for the angry, tottering old man who had been robbed of his newly found faith in humanity.

She put her hand out to him in an involuntary gesture of appeal. But it was Austin who caught and held that hand.

"Vina—my wife," he murmured. "Don't leave me. I forgive you."

Suddenly it was all too much for Serena. The outrage, the irony of it all hit her like a blow. Peels of hysterical laughter rang to the rafters of the somber room.

"Wife!" she fairly shrieked. "Wife! I'm no more your wife than—"

Serena never finished her sentence. She was running through the long foyer hall as fast as her shaking legs would carry her.

SHE gave a long sigh of relief as the elevator carried her to the street floor below.

Out in the clean air she walked slowly, trying to focus her scattered faculties. From blind force of habit, she turned south a few blocks and walked across town toward her former boarding-house. She was glad that she had kept her room, paying the rent in advance.

Thankfully, she let herself in and drew off the hateful dress, so painfully associated with her unhappy escapade. She slid into a pair of worn velvet pajamas and sat staring out of the window at the dust-gray backyard landscape, that was her only view.

The numbness was wearing off,

now, and a feverish, aching wound seemed to have taken the place of her heart. She closed her eyes and pressed her damp forehead against the cool windowpane.

"Serena, beloved!" Robert's voice seemed to come to her as though from a great distance.

And her whole being cried out, across the housetops, in loving answer to the man she knew, surely, she would never see again. The man who had loved her, until she had been dragged through a gutter of lies.

Serena never knew how long she sat there. A sound that she had learned to fear aroused her. Someone was knocking at her door. She sat immovable, fearing to answer, watching the doorknob with wide eyes as it twisted frantically.

Then, "Serena!"

In one bound she was across the room, fumbling with the lock. No sooner had her shaking hands shot back the old-fashioned bolt, than the door sprung open and Robert Burton stood before her. His dark eyes were sunken, his young face haggard.

He did not speak, but closed the door firmly behind him. Then he turned to the white-faced girl and swept her into his arms.

"Darling—darling," he whispered brokenly, into the fragrance of her hair. "Don't send me away. I love you with all my heart. I was a coward to leave you there. No matter what you have been to him, it was all my fault, so help me. I sent you there. Serena, beloved, I want you for my wife."

She looked up into his face and her lips trembled with words she could not speak. This—*this* was enough, for now. Later she would explain it all, and put his heart at rest; but now—

She closed her tired eyes as his lips found hers.

When he released her, she looked out on an enchanted world. Her head thrown back in his embrace, she gazed through the window at the deep blue of the star-studded sky, then at the rooftops below. They were painted silver now, by the master brush of the moon, and the world, like her heart, was clean again.

Robert, brushing the curls back from her clear brow, said, "I'm afraid we'll be rather poor for a while, darling. I'll have to start all over again, now. I won't be a member of—"

Serena laid a cool finger across his lips. She never wanted to hear that other name again.

But she *was* to hear it, sooner than she dreamed.

They had been married two short, blissful weeks when the letter came. The new Mrs. Burton's eyes misted with tears as she read it. It was half-scolding, humorously apologetic, and it offered Robert Burton a splendid opportunity with a famous mid-Western packing house.

It was signed, "Chalmers Jason."

Two Poems by Gertrude Grymes Smith

These I Will Be Keeping

THESE I will be keeping:
Each cherished little sin,
The kiss I gave to Harold
Much to his chagrin.

The ribbon I wore skating
Because I felt so gay,
With deaf ear turned to laughter
At my childish way.

Little moments stolen
To dance across the floor
When no one is looking
And my spirits soar.

Little sins I'm saving;
None so very bold.
Still they keep folks guessing
If I'm young or old.

Nocturne

THE moon with magic finger tips
Has turned the sails of little ships
To lovely wings of silver white
Against the curtain of the night.

They drift and slowly come to rest
Upon a crystal foaming crest
And settle back in peaceful dreams
Where little ripples gather gleams.

And when the moon is riding low,
The little ships that come and go,
Leave long black shadows on her face
That move with swift and airy grace.

For night has donned a silver veil
And with the passing of each sail,
She lifts a corner, peering through
With eyes that speak of stars—and you.

The Rivals

By BEULAH POYNTER

"Love me, love my Peke!" Her ultimatum was too much for any he-man's pride

SALLY pulled up the shades and looked out at the sky. Then she gave a happy little laugh, stooped quickly and gathered up Peewee's small body in a tight embrace.

"The sun is shining, baby! It's going to be a glorious day! Oh, Peewee, isn't it grand? You're six months old today! Your birthday, darling, and the sun is shining!"

Peewee wriggled enthusiastically. His small red tongue tried frantically to caress Sally's round, pink cheek, and his richly plumed tail wagged with appreciation of the day, his mistress, affection and his joy in living.

"Of course," Sally added, nestling her dimpled chin in Peewee's golden fluff, "Tod doesn't know it's your birthday. But we know it, don't we,

Precious? And it will make the outing all the grander."

She placed the puppy on the floor and, singing happily, went about preparing her breakfast in the tiny kitchenette adjoining her combined livingroom and bedroom. Tod was coming for her at nine o'clock. That was enough to make her sing. Whenever she thought of Tod and the warm, vital masculinity of him, her pulses raced and her throat swelled. She was the luckiest girl in the world!

Of course the car didn't belong to Tod, but the salesman who had demonstrated it to them last week was positive he was going to buy it. And Tod was hoping fervently that he could. Also hoping, Sally knew, that she had so fallen in love with the car's smooth mechanism and beautiful lines that she would see the advisability of being extravagant.

They were going to be married in a month. Already their bank accounts had been depleted to purchase the furnishings for an adorable five-room apartment in the West Nineties.

If Tod bought the car, it would have to be on credit and Sally loathed debt. Last week they had talked for an hour or more upon the subject. Tod agreed heartily with her that a young couple, no matter how healthy, no matter how splendid their prospects, should not begin married life under a burden of debt.

"But," he had added, "we'd hardly miss ten dollars a month, honey. Morgan says he can manage to make the payments that low and—"

"But it would take two years for you to pay for it at that rate."

"I suppose so." Tod had sighed and looked down at Peewee, chewing on his shoestrings.

Sally had had a strangled feeling for a moment that Tod regretted the hundred dollars he had spent in buying Peewee, though certainly the pup had repaid, in affection, a dozen times that amount.

Sometimes Sally was almost positive that, in spite of her adoration, Peewee loved Tod better. His step was enough to set every hair in the little animal's body atingle. Peewee wriggled and squirmed until he seemed possessed of twelve legs instead of four, when Tod came into the room.

Tod didn't possess a pair of socks that the Peke's small claws hadn't damaged, in his frantic efforts to climb into his lap. And, curiously, Tod paid but little attention to the puppy.

"He's as cute as a bug's ear, Sally," he'd admit, "but you can't expect a man to go nuts over a Peke. Give me a hound or a terrier but—Gosh, I'm always afraid I'll hurt these toy dogs."

Sally retrieved one of her best shoes, just before Peewee made a meal on it. She scolded him indulgently, placed him on a cushion beside the table, and sat down to her toast and coffee.

Peewee looked first bewildered, then very sad. His brown eyes, under a tangle of lashes and brows and whiskers, reproached her so much that she took him up in her lap and fed him scraps of toast.

"Now you must be good," she admonished. "I don't intend to be late this morning."

Peewee was ominously quiet while she hastily bathed, manicured her nails, waved her hair and donned her new tweed suit which was to be part of her trousseau. Too late she remembered the hat that had been delivered the night before. She had left it on the hall bench, with the lid raised and a bit of the tissue paper drooping over the side.

Now Peewee sat in the center of torn

paper, bits of cardboard, and the remains of the felt hat that was to have been a traveling accessory. He looked up with as nearly a grin as a small dog could achieve, and wagged his tail.

Sally screamed and snatched what was left of the hat. Ribbon and jaunty feather were in tatters. In the brim was a hole, and another in the crown. Ten dollars gone in thirty minutes.

"Oh!" Sally wailed and dropped forlornly upon the rug. "I ought to sell you! I ought to sell you to that Mr. Parsons across the hall! He wants you, but not to love you, as I have. He says you're worth two hundred dollars to him, but you aren't worth two cents to me, you — you abominable little nuisance!"

Peewee wiggled into her lap, licked her cheek and whined contritely. Sally pushed him away. He sat back on his haunches, pondering. This was a situation quite beyond puppy comprehension. Never in the four long months since Sally had taken him into her heart and home had she repulsed him. She had scolded him, but never in this tone of voice. And never had she cried.

Something was very wrong. He growled at the thing that had changed his goddess from a laughing girl into a strange woman with a harsh voice.

Sally continued to weep tears of chagrin and annoyance.

Peewee changed his growl to a shrill bark. Still no caressing hand patted his head. He bit his own tail, then began to whirl in frantic race to keep up with it. Sally didn't laugh. So he ceased to chase his tail, jerked the hat out of her lap and shook it violently, emitting queer, throaty rumbles that moved every muscle of his fat tummy.

"Peewee!" Sally cried, and snatched the hat away. "Oh, my good heavens— Peewee!"

He lost his balance and fell on his back. Four legs struggled in the air for two minutes before he could right himself, and in spite of herself Sally laughed.

"What's the use?" she shrugged. "It's my fault. I know what puppies are. Anyway, nothing is going to spoil this day."

The house phone rang. Sally wiped her eyes and answered it.

"Mr. Collins callin'," said the boy below.

"Be right down."

Sally slipped the jacket of her suit over her new white satin blouse, tossed the ruined hat into the hall closet, found the one she had worn all winter, and jammed it on her head with utter disregard for her newly waved hair. She caught up her purse and, with the puppy under her arm, ran to the elevator.

"Nice day," said the colored operator.

"Glorious!" Sally cried enthusiastically.

It was glorious! Peewee and Tod and a lifetime of happiness ahead! What did a ruined hat matter, when there was so much love in the world?

Tod stood outside by a fire plug, his gold-brown eyes eagerly watching the door. Sally cried, "Hello!" and he grinned.

She loved his grin. It was so boyish, and it robbed his rugged features of a certain austerity they possessed when in repose. Then, too, it matched his freckles, and a nose inclined to be snub.

Tod wasn't handsome, Sally admitted, but he was magnetic. He had personality, push, determination. He'd go places, and he was going to take Sally with him.

There was something about the way he walked, the set of his broad shoulders, that informed everyone Tod

Collins was destined for big things. He wouldn't always be a bank cashier. His enthusiasm, his integrity, his aggressiveness would take him far in the financial world.

It always gave Sally a thrill to realize that he had chosen her of all the world to help him along in his career.

"Where's the car?" she asked breathlessly when he squeezed her hand and enveloped her with a look that was as thrilling as a kiss.

"Around the corner. Couldn't park in front of this plug. I haven't the roll to risk a ticket at present. Give the pooch to the doorman, and we'll be on our way."

"Do—*what?*"

"GIVE Peewee to the doorman, I said." He pulled the pup's ears.

"Why, Tod, I wouldn't think of letting the doorman handle him! Anyway, he's going with us."

"No, darling, that's out. The car doesn't belong to me. Knowing Peewee's destructive nature, I wouldn't take him joy riding in borrowed property on a bet."

"You know," she said stubbornly, "I wouldn't leave him behind."

"You will this time, sweetheart," he said with irritating suaveness "He'll be all right."

"Tod Collins! A whole day! Why, he'd grieve himself to death!"

"Nonsense."

"It isn't nonsense at all. Why, he's simply frantic when I leave him alone, just to go to market. Why, there's no telling what would happen to him if I left him for a whole day."

"Do you intend to lug him along, every place you go?"

"I most certainly do! That is, until he's old enough to understand."

"That's a hot one," he muttered. "And just when do you think he'll be old enough to understand?"

"Not for a long time. He's only a baby now. Six months old!"

"So that," he drawled, his eyes narrowing and a funny tight line settling about his generous mouth, "is why you've refused to go to the theater and night clubs with me recently?"

She nodded.

"In other words, where the pup can't go, you won't go?"

"You understand, Tod, that—"

"No, I'm hanged if I do! I expected you to love him and be kind to him, but not be a slave to him, nor stand me up for him."

"Stand you up?" she repeated incredulously.

"Exactly. Three times in the last month you've let me buy tickets for shows, and at the last minute found some excuse for not going. And it was the pooch every time."

"Once I thought he was getting distemper," she said hotly. "Surely you didn't expect me to desert him, then. It's nearly always fatal. And then he swallowed the safety pin, and I had to take him to the vet. And—and—"

"He was afraid of the dark and yowled, and the tickets only cost me six bucks," Tod sneered.

"Tod!" she gasped. "Why, I thought you loved him—so little and frightened and dependent on me! Don't you love him?" She held the squirming body close to his face.

"Hell—no!" he exploded. "Do I look like the kind of man that would love *that?*"

"Tod! Tod Collins!"

"Well," he demanded, "are we going, or aren't we?"

"I'm most certainly not going without Peewee."

He ground his cigarette into the pavement, and stared down into her slowly whitening face. "D'you mean that, Sally?"

"I most certainly do. There's no reason on earth why I should leave him alone all day in an empty apartment, to eat his little heart out in loneliness and fear. He wouldn't hurt the old car. I could keep him on my lap all the way."

"Hah!" he sneered.

"He wouldn't eat or sleep without me. He might get into anything. I might come home to find him dead. Just because you don't own the car is no excuse. You don't want him along. That's all!"

"All right, I don't want him. Maybe I want you to myself for a change. Maybe I want to hear some sensible conversation addressed to *me*. Do you realize that nothing has interested you for four months but that mutt? That you haven't addressed twenty words to me personally? It's always, 'Precious, tell Tod what we want to do.' 'Blessed, do you think Toddie would like roast lamb for dinner?' 'Honey bunch, Toddie doesn't want you to climb on his lap.'

"Lord, it's gagged me! And calling me Daddy! I'm not that mutt's daddy, no matter what you think you are!"

"Why—Tod!" she gasped again.

"I'd like to feel for one day that I mattered to you as much as a dog—a lap dog, not even a real dog."

"You're jealous!" she cried. "Why Tod Collins, you're jealous of Peewee!"

"I am *not!* When I'm jealous of a two-by-four pooch, you can send me to Bellevue."

"Better commit yourself now, for you are jealous of Peewee."

He glared. She glared back.

"Do we go, or do we not?" he asked, his voice thick with rage.

"We do *not.*"

"All right, spend the day with a dog. Coddle him. Cuddle him to your heart's content. I'll find someone to drive to the country with me."

"I hope you get a blonde," she flared.

She turned and with irritating deliberation walked toward the double doors leading into the lobby.

He called after her. "I'll let you know whether she's a blonde or a brunette."

"Do!" she flung sweetly over her shoulder. "And be sure she doesn't like dogs."

"You can darned well bank on that! I'll tell you all about it at dinner."

"Dinner?"

That arrested her.

"Sure. Nothing to do but look after a mutt. You might be able to fix up some sort of meal for me out of his left-overs."

"Mutt!" she cried, and flounced into the building.

AS SHE waited for the elevator, a gentleman came in and waited with her. He was her neighbor from across the hall. Through Peewee, she had a slight acquaintance with him, and knew him to be a dog fancier, with several kennels out on Long Island.

He was tall and lean, with kind, heavy gray eyes and dark, gray-sprinkled hair. His skin was leathery and full of little lines, and his mouth was tight-lipped. But there was an engaging gleam in his eyes, and when he smiled there was a friendly quality about him that was very attractive.

He said, "Good morning, Miss Dixon."

Sally stammered, "Good morning,

Mr. Parsons," and tried to smile.

"Been taking Peewee for a constitutional?" He stooped and patted the pup's silky head.

"No." She hoped she wasn't going to cry. Heavens, would that elevator ever descend?

"Great little animal. Shows he's an aristocrat."

Sally choked. And Tod had called him a mutt and sneered at him.

"He has ten champions in his ancestry," she said fiercely.

"I don't doubt it. Fine head. I'd like to own him. I'd make a champion out of him."

The elevator reached the lobby, and they entered it.

Sally said with a choked laugh, "I didn't know men liked Pekes."

"A man who likes dogs likes any kind. Still don't want to sell him?"

"No! I wouldn't part with Peewee for a million dollars."

"I won't give a million," he laughed, "but I'll raise my offer another fifty. I'll give you two hundred and fifty dollars for him."

Sally blinked. "Why?"

"I think I could make it back on him, and more. He rates several blue ribbons if I know anything about dogs. But two fifty for a six-month-old pup is a pretty good price."

"I know," she murmured. "But I couldn't sell him. I'm glad someone appreciates him, though."

She entered her tiny apartment and dumped the pup on the floor. She was determined not to let what Tod had said disturb her. He'd be sorry and telephone in a little while to tell her so. Of course he wouldn't go to the country without her. Probably he was on his way back to the salesroom with the car now.

When he apologized for being such a brute, she wouldn't give in at once. He *should* be sorry. The idea of a man being jealous of a baby dog! A tiny mite he had given to her himself. A little bit of affection who loved Tod more than anyone in the world.

Why, it was ridiculous! Maybe Tod didn't like dogs at all. Oh, dear, that would be awful. There was something lacking in a man who didn't like dogs.

Ten o'clock rolled around, but Tod didn't telephone. He had always been the first to apologize when they quarreled. Maybe he *had* gone to the country. Maybe—

Panic caught at her heart. Maybe he had taken another girl! She didn't deserve that. Just because she loved a little animal that was his own gift to her.

She paced the apartment with Peewee in her arms, watching the hands of her watch moving slowly around the dial. By noon she could endure the suspense no longer. She telephoned to the man who had demonstrated the car.

"This is Miss Dixon," she said. "Has Mr. Collins been in your place this morning?"

"Oh, yes, early, to take out the car he is thinking of buying."

"Not since?"

"No. We don't expect him until around five o'clock. He wanted to try the machine on a country road. I understood that you were going with him."

"I—I didn't go," she said and hung up the receiver.

A blonde? A brunette? Oh, Tod, if you've taken Mabel Drew with you today I'll never speak to you as long as I live! Or that hateful Fleeta Owens! Oh, Peewee, we didn't think he'd do it, did we?

Suppose he never telephoned again.

Suppose, because of his dislike for Peewee, he wouldn't want to marry her.

She stopped dead in the center of the room, her heart pounding as though it would burst through her flesh. Why, life without Tod was unthinkable!

For two years she had lived and breathed and dreamed for Tod. And now he was jealous of the love she bore little Peewee. Peewee was adorable, but the great reason she loved him so much was because Tod had given him to her.

When another hour had passed, a deadly numbness settled over her. Tod had gone to the country. And he hadn't gone alone.

But perhaps even if he had taken another girl, no one really counted but herself. She wouldn't be angry. She wouldn't even let him know how much she cared. And she would show him

"I'd like to feel for one day that I mattered to you as much as a dog"

"Why, Tod! You're jealous of Peewee!"

that he meant more to her than all the dogs in the world.

At two o'clock the telephone rang. Sally was so expectant that she stumbled blindly to the private phone and sobbed into the mouthpiece, "Hello Tod!" There was no answer.

Then she realized it was the house phone that had rung.

She was tempted not to answer it. Some agent, perhaps, wanting to show her his wares, or someone she didn't want to see, calling on her. But habit sent her to the kitchenette. She took down the receiver and mumbled, "Hello."

Tod's voice answered. "Sally?"

"Oh, Tod!" she wailed. "Tod, did you go to the country?"

"I'm in one heck of a mess," he said thickly. "Just wanted to be sure you were home before I came upstairs."

SHE waited for him with the door open. But even what he had said did not prepare her for his appearance.

His suit was grease-spotted and torn. There was a smear of blood-streaked grease on one cheek. His hands looked as though he had bathed them in mud, and his hair was disheveled. He wore no hat.

"Tod!" she gasped.

He slid into the room and closed the door. For a moment he did not speak, just stood looking down at her with a wild expression in his eyes and a sickly grin on his face.

"Wha—what happened?" she whispered hoarsely, visions of murder and theft and every dire thing possible conjured up by the expression on his white face.

"The worst!" he groaned and slumped into the nearest chair.

Peewee, yapping with delight, leaped at him, but was neither repulsed nor welcomed. And for once Sally had no thoughts of her pet.

"The worst?" she repeated.

"Any of that brandy left?" he asked.

"I think so." She hurried into the kitchenette, found the bottle he had left a week before, poured him a drink and gave it to him. He swallowed, straightened up and laughed.

"What do you mean—the worst, Tod?" she asked, clasping her hands over her breast, her face as tragic as his had been the minute before.

"I've smashed the car."

"Oh! Is that all? I thought maybe you'd killed someone."

"All!" he exclaimed. "Do you realize that car sells for five hundred bucks—it's only a year old—and I haven't five hundred cents at the present moment?"

"Isn't it insured?" she asked in a properly squelched voice.

"What good does that do me? It was my fault, and the company will make me pay the damages or buy the car.

"It was my fault," he repeated as her lips parted. "If I hadn't been so darned sore at you and the pooch, I would have looked where I was going, and I wouldn't have been driving at sixty miles an hour. Well, anyway, I went into a telephone pole, and I'm lucky to be here to tell the tale."

"Oh, darling!" she wailed and dropped on her knees beside him. "Are you sure you aren't hurt? There's blood on your cheek. Let me call a doctor. Let me—"

"I'm not hurt," he said, softening under her sympathy. "But I'm worried sick. I managed to get the thing back to town. It's downstairs, but I don't know what to do about it."

She wound her arms around him and

rested her cheek against his. "You wanted to buy it, didn't you?"

"Sure I did. But nobody would buy it as it stands. And what would I do for money if I did buy it?"

"If you bought it," she continued, paying no attention to what he said, "you could telephone that Mr. Morgan you were keeping it, and he'd never know what you had done to it."

He took her face between his two hands and looked at her. "Sometimes, Sally," he said, "your reasoning simply floors me. Next week when I get my salary I could pay for the thing—that is, the first down payment—but today I couldn't buy a broken windshield. And unless I make a down payment, that car has to go back to the store. Even if I could buy it, what would I do with it? There's enough damage done to set us back another hundred dollars."

She sprang to her feet. "Wash your face and hands," she said in a businesslike way, "then we'll go downstairs and see how it's damaged. If you could drive it, it isn't completely ruined. We'll buy it."

"*We'll buy it!* I've just been telling you—"

"I know you have. But—" She looked down at Peewee, and a little knife turned in her heart. "I'll get the money."

"How?"

She bit her lip. "You know that Mr. Parsons who raises show dogs? Remember I told you he offered me two hundred for Peewee? Today he raised the offer to two fifty, and maybe I can get him to give me three hundred."

He looked aghast. "You wouldn't sell Peewee!"

"Not unless it was necessary. But it is necessary now, and anyway"—a sob choked her—"you don't like him, and he'd always be a bone of contention between us."

He looked at her steadily. "This Parsons really likes dogs?"

"Oh, yes. He loves them and—well, later, after the car is paid for we'll get a terrier or some kind of big dog. Wash your face."

Neither had anything to say as they descended in the elevator. The car, badly scarred, with a broken windshield and a bent fender, was parked in front of the building. Seeing it, Sally sent up a prayer of gratitude that Tod had not been killed. It would hurt to give up Peewee, but she owed that much for Tod's being alive.

They walked around the machine. Tod tested the engine, the tanks, and decided that maybe fifty dollars would put it in shape again.

"Then we can have a lot of fun in it," Sally said cheerfully. "Take it to a garage or a service station and telephone Mr. Morgan you'll be over in the morning to pay for it. Come back to dinner, and I'll have the money for it."

"Just a loan," Tod said quickly. "I'll give it back to you on payday."

"Just a loan," she said.

AS ALWAYS, Peewee waited just inside the door. She caught him up, and let her tears drench his shaggy side.

"You understand, don't you, baby?" she sobbed. "Even little puppies do understand. Tod is my man, my husband, and I've got to help him out. But I love you. You know I love you, and I wouldn't sell you to anyone who wouldn't be kind to you and love you, too. I'll give you your dinner, and then we'll go see Mr. Parsons."

She watched the pup thrust his muzzle into the mixture of vegetables and meat that was his meal. Then, when he

had finished, her chin set with determination, her eyes glittering with the tears she was forcing back, she marched across the hall.

She rang the bell and waited. Every minute she felt weaker in the knees, less brave about her sacrifice.

Parsons himself opened the door. He looked uncertainly at her at first, then exclaimed:

"Why, bless my soul, it's Peewee and his little mistress! Do come in."

Sally shook her head. "No, thanks. We—er—I didn't come to call. I've decided to accept your offer. But could you—er—don't you think Peewee is worth three hundred dollars—I mean, to you? I know he isn't worth that much to anyone who doesn't love him, but—"

"Just a minute," he interrupted, laughing. "Do you mean you are ready to sell Peewee?"

"Yes." Unconsciously her arms tightened around the dog's little, fat body.

"Come in, please, and we'll talk about it."

"There isn't anything to talk about," Sally said, entering reluctantly.

If she talked she would begin to cry. The only thing to do was to turn over Peewee as quickly as possible and flee.

"Do sit down," said Parsons. He indicated a roomy divan that was largely occupied by a sleepy-eyed collie. "Plato is too old to be annoyed, and he likes pups anyway."

Gingerly Sally seated herself beside the collie. Peewee wriggled in her lap, and pricked up his ears. The collie raised his head, sniffed and stretched his neck. In a moment he was nuzzling the Peke.

Sally laughed tremulously. "They'll be friends. He'll keep Peewee from missing me."

"No other dog can take the place of a beloved master or mistress," Parsons said gently. "That's why we never let show dogs get very attached to humans. They might grieve themselves to death if separated."

"Peewee is too young to have grown very attached to me," Sally said. "You don't think he'd grieve to death?"

"No." Mr. Parsons smiled. "What changed your mind? Why do you want to sell him?"

"Why—er—he's such a gorgeous animal, and as you say he would take ribbons, and you know how to train him and I don't, and—well, any way you can learn to love any kind of dog, and," she ended feebly, "I need the money."

"I see." He took Peewee in his arms and stood him on the library table. "I see. But two fifty is the best I can do, Miss Dixon."

"I'll—I'll take it," Sally gulped. She couldn't look at Peewee.

"A check? Or would you prefer cash?"

"If you have the cash—" she stammered.

"Fortunately I have. I visited the bank today."

He crossed to a little wall safe and opened it. For a mad moment, Sally felt impelled to grab Peewee in her arms and run; then she thought of Tod and his predicament. Tod, whom she loved better than anyone in the world. Tod, who was going to be her husband.

Parsons extended the roll. "Do you really want to sell the puppy?" he asked, scrutinizing her tense little face. "I think he's a gorgeous little animal, and I want him, but I know what it means to love a dog. I shouldn't want to buy him unless I thought you really wanted to get rid of him."

"I—I have to do it," Sally said, her

chin tucked into the folds of her blouse. Tears choked her. "I love him, and I'd never, never sell him if Tod wasn't in such a jam."

"Tod?"

"We're to be married next month and—"

Suddenly she was telling him everything.

All about the apartment she and Tod were to have together, how Tod had wanted a car, ever since she had known him, and once had been ready to put a down payment on one but had bought Peewee for her instead.

She blamed herself for the accident, because after all she could have left Peewee at home, and nothing would have harmed him. And anyway Tod was right in not wanting to take a destructive puppy in a machine that didn't belong to him.

"The payment for it is how much?" Mr. Parsons asked, gently stroking Peewee's back.

"A hundred and fifty dollars," she answered, "but it will take another fifty to make the car presentable."

"Suppose," he said, "you borrow two hundred dollars from me? I don't know your young man, but I feel that we are friends, and that I am safe in lending you the money."

"Oh!" Sally exclaimed. Color flamed her cheeks.

"Oh!" she cried again.

He put Peewee into her arms. "Take him," he said, and put his hand on her head.

"Now, now," he soothed, as she began to sob softly, "I'm doing it for the pup. We wouldn't make him unhappy, would we? Take the money, and when you can, return it to me."

"Oh!" Sally wailed. "You are wonderful. Someday I'll—the first son Peewee has I'll give to you."

TOD was outside the door when she appeared. His face lighted when he saw Peewee in her arms.

"So Parsons didn't want him after all?" he said. "I'm glad he didn't, hon. I'd never forgive myself if I did anything to hurt you, or if the little codger did grieve himself to death. I'm going to try to raise the fifty bucks needed to patch up the car, tell Morgan the truth, and ask him to let me wait a while on the certainty that I'll buy the machine."

"Oh, Tod!" she cried ecstatically. "I do believe you love Peewee even if he is only a Peke."

He grinned sheepishly. "Well, I don't hate him, and I guess for the kind of dog he is, he's a pretty fine little beast."

"He is," she laughed happily. "And he's saved your life. Listen!"

And breathlessly she recounted what had happened.

"Well, I'm darned!" Tod said. "Can you tie that! Well—say, pooch, I guess there's something in the saying that a dog is a man's best friend."

Then he kissed Sally vehemently and let Peewee lick his cheek, and they went into the apartment.

"Say, Sally," he began, "I'm sorry—"

"It's all right, Tod," she interrupted. "I know it was only because you were jealous of Peewee."

"If you think I'm jealous"—then he laughed. "Yeah, I reckon that's the truth. But I see what a chump I was. A girl like you has a heart big enough for both a man and a dog, and Peewee and I know what lucky guys we are to have you."

Girl in a Million

By VIRGINIA SAWYER

She hated America's boy friend, sight unseen

SALLY ST. JOHN was a girl in a million. She didn't like Gordon Turner. Or perhaps she was a girl in two million, because she hated him.

Every time she heard his voice on a record or over the radio, little shivers of distaste crawled up her spine. Every time she saw a preview of his latest picture, she longed to slap his smug, sissy boy face. And when she read an interview or an article about him in a movie magazine, it took her appetite away.

"Mrs. Rigby's Headache Tablets now bring you the silver tones of Gordon Turner," the announcer said.

A magical hush, the soft opening strains of "L'amour Toujours L'amour" and then—His Voice.

Signal for a million women to go into a trance. Signal for as many men to tear their hair in thwarted rage. Signal for black-eyed Sally St. John to hop out of her chair, glare at her innocent, midget-sized radio and turn it off with a vicious snap.

That was why Sally didn't go to see his personal appearance at the Palace,

although it was just around the corner and it was her one day off from waiting on table at the Epicure Restaurant.

That was why she sniffed scornfully at the mob of fanatical women waiting outside the theater in the pouring rain. The mob that worshiped and adored him; that would hound him for his autograph, pull buttons from his coat, hairs from his head or perchance tear him limb from limb and divide him up.

She wouldn't put anything past them in the state they were in. Excitement hit a new high because not only was it their hero's first personal appearance in the city, but the dreaded Purple Gang had been sending extortion notes, threatening to kidnap him.

It was a well-known fact that Gordon Turner was completing his tour against the wishes of his Hollywood producers.

"He's probably scared to death," thought Sally as she rocked back and forth furiously.

She looked like a streak of flame in her bright wool dress that lit up the dismal, late afternoon gray of her cheap, furnished room.

"Yes, he's probably cringing in his dressing room right now, divided between his desires to go forth and dazzle the female population of the city, and fear for his precious little neck."

Through her open window, sheltered by the fire escape from the driving rain, Sally could hear the mutterings of the crowd and the frequent, shrill blasts of police whistles, trying to keep them in order.

Then there was a slight lull.

"Well," she said to herself, a sarcastic little smile making a scarlet satin twist of her lips, "Heaven's gift to women must have come and gone. Peace reigns."

And just as she thought it, there was a crash that could be nothing more nor less than the falling in of the roof. She dropped her sewing and looked up, her heart in her mouth.

A young man lay flat on his stomach in the middle of her shabby carpet, and a trail of dirt and broken flower pots led from his prostrate form to the open window by the fire escape.

"Pardon me," he said, "for not knocking!"

HE untangled himself from her geranium plants and got shakily to his feet.

She saw in a split second that he was tall and young and poorly dressed; that he was pale and breathless and soaking wet from the rain. She saw that he had the bluest eyes in the world.

"Who are you?" she gasped.

And just as he opened his mouth to speak, someone knocked on the door.

He threw her a brief, imploring glance and disappeared like lightning into the bathroom.

Sally swallowed hard and, opening the door a crack, stuck her nose out. Two fat policemen stood waiting. She stifled the little cry that sprang to her lips and stepped quickly into the hall.

"We're looking for information about the gang who kidnaped Gordon Turner, the movie star," they told her. "It happened just ten minutes ago by the stage door of the Palace."

"What do you think I know about it?"

"You're the only woman we've found home, so far, whose windows overlooked the alley. They all went to see him, I guess, and they're out there yet. Did you see anything strange in your alley? There's only a brick wall dividing it from the backyard of the Palace. A good athlete could scale it

easy enough. The gang got clean away."

"Oh, no, it didn't," thought Sally, beginning to feel wobbly in the knees. "There's some of it now in my bathroom."

She started to speak, and then hesitated. He was so young, so hunted-looking, with his coat collar turned up against the rain, his straight blond hair all mussed and on end like a little boy's. He was a dangerous criminal—and his eyes were blue as a summer sky.

"I—I didn't see anything," she lied.

And after a few more routine questions, the policemen went away.

"You can come out now," she called in a flat little voice. "They're gone."

"Friends of yours?"

"The police." She sat down weakly on the studio couch. "I lied to them. They asked me if I'd seen any of the kidnapers and I said 'No.'"

"Kidnapers? What kidnapers? Was there a nice new kidnaping in the neighborhood today?"

His assumed innocence and his insolent grin maddened her. She was on her feet, stormy-eyed and shaking with rage. Her fists clenched at her sides and her voice shook with sarcasm.

"Kidnapers! You ask me what kidnapers! Why, you and your gang, of course. You can't fool me. You're the tail end of the notorious Purple Gang that got Mama's Boy Turner. You must be the—the lookout or something. They had to leave you behind, so you skinned over the wall, climbed up the fire escape and dove into my room.

"But as long as your friends only muss up his curls and scare the smirk off his face it's all right by me," she went on. "He earns his money by cheating the public, anyway. But the police think different.

"I lied for you, deliberately shielded you from the law, and you have the nerve to stand there and play innocent. The least you can do is to admit it!"

Suddenly all the anger died within her, and she stood twisting her hands and looking out the window at the flat, brick wall. She felt all weak and sick inside. Why, oh, why didn't he deny or explain? Because, of course, he couldn't. He was exactly what she had accused him of being.

"Why did you do that for me?" he asked.

"I don't know. I—I guess I'm just a pushover."

But she knew it wasn't true. She'd been out on her own a long, long time, and she'd never done such a weak, foolish, crazy thing before. As far as men were concerned she was the original hard-boiled Hannah.

For a moment he stood looking down at her in a quizzical sort of way. His mouth was stern, but his eyes danced with a gay mockery.

"So you're a pushover," he laughed. "Well, I'm a pushover, too. See? A pushover for little, dark-eyed French dolls with red lips and straight black bangs."

Sally's fingers were trembling when she laid a blue glass ash tray beside him on the couch.

"Have a cigarette," she said briskly. "Then out you go!"

AS she hurried about the room, cleaning up the remains of her geraniums that lay all over the floor, she could feel his eyes on her, boring into her back, laughing at her. Her cheeks burned with shame, and she bit back the angry tears that kept forcing their way up from her proud, aching little heart.

She thought, ironically, of the words

that Marie, the other waitress on her shift, had said only yesterday:

"You're the hard-boiled type that talks a lot and then falls like a ton of bricks. You're a one-man woman, Sally, my girl, and if you fall for the wrong man, it's going to be just too bad."

Well, it was going to be just too bad, from now on. Sally looked through her eyelashes at the tall, blond young giant sprawled out on her couch, lazily puffing at his cigarette. The police of a big city were hot on his trail, and he could lie there like that and grin at her disarmingly like a mischievous little boy caught stealing apples.

"He's hard as nails," thought Sally, clenching her teeth, "and I love him. Even in this short time I love him. And in a few minutes he'll walk out through that door forever."

Tick-tock, tick-tock, raced the clock on the wall, and thump-thump, thump-thump, raced her heart along beside it as the precious seconds sped away.

"Well"—he was on his feet now—"I'll be leaving you, baby." It was as easy as that for him.

"Wait!"

He stopped at her urgent cry, his hand on the doorknob.

Impulsively she rushed to the mantel and reached for the metal can that held her tips for the week. She poured its contents into his empty pocket.

"Hey, what do you think I am, taking money from a skirt?" He scooped the change out again and held it toward her.

"You're broke, aren't you?" she snapped. "You can't get away on nothing. Forget it. Just make out you never met me and—go!"

She turned her back on him and walked blindly toward the window. It was a pretty good job of bluffing, but it wasn't quite good enough.

He was by her side in a moment, forcing her with firm, gentle fingers to lift her chin and look at him.

"You like me, don't you, kid?"

His blue eyes were probing the very depths of her heart. Their almost hypnotic power was forcing her to answer.

"Yes, I like you," she choked. "So what?"

"This is what."

His eager hands pressed hard against the small of her back and folded her close. And then he was kissing her. Not laughingly, not insultingly, but as if—she was afraid to think it—as if he loved her, too.

It was too good to be true. But it *was* true, for he was saying so.

"I love you, honey. From the first I did. I'd made up my mind that I was coming back some day to find out if you did. It's so hard to believe even now that a girl like you could fall for a bum like me."

He held her at arm's length and his eyes were burning into her very soul.

"If I promise to go straight from now on, will you marry me and take a chance on the future? We'll have to go in the night, down the fire escape, the way I came. We'll bum our way to Canada, because if the police don't get me, the gang will. It means being hungry and cold sometimes, being on the jump and hunted—maybe always. I'll never be rich or famous or anything, just a plain, homely mutt, loving you a lot and trying to live down the past. Could you love me as I am now—for myself alone?"

He was looking at her strangely, intently, as if the world stood still and waited for her answer.

"Yes, oh, yes," whispered Sally, breathless and shiny-eyed.

AN hour had passed before they thought of food, of packing, of Sally collecting her pay at the Epicure to add to their small stake of the tip box.

"Two against the world," announced Sally, hopping up and standing behind his chair.

"Short on cash," he added, "but awfully long on love."

And then, of course, he had to pull her down on his lap again and kiss her to prove it.

It wasn't for another hour, after the soft dusk of late afternoon had crept into darkness, that they thought of anything in the world except each other.

Finally Sally pulled down the shades and put on the light. Removing a brown baize screen in the corner, she revealed a tiny gas jet.

"Mrs. Hegersheimer's boy Gus always was a great hand in the kitchen," he boasted while she tied the sash of one of her ridiculous little organdie aprons around his middle.

"So that's your name," she remarked innocently.

And they both nearly collapsed with hysterics because tomorrow it was going to be hers, also, and she hadn't known nor cared.

"Mine's Sally St. John." She bowed mockingly, while a dimple perked up the right side of her mouth. "In case you're interested."

They pulled out the bridge table and laid it with a gay striped linen cloth, and Sally dug into the tip box to get change for chops and a can of peas.

She ran down the stairs lightly, humming a little tune like a happy child. But she didn't come back that way. Her feet dragged as if the newspaper she carried under her arm had been printed on sheets of lead.

Aloud he read the headlines: " 'Gordon Turner Mysteriously Kidnaped at Stage Door. Producers in Hollywood Frantic. Ready to Pay Ransom.' "

And then in smaller type, but most terrifying of all:

" 'Drag net spread from city to cover the whole country. All clues being followed up diligently by police. Arrest expected within twelve hours.' "

He sat down suddenly, as pale as herself. His confidence was evidently badly shaken.

It had seemed so easy, the way he had outlined their escape. They had been so uplifted by the miracle of their newborn love, that they had underestimated everything: the crime, the punishment, the dangerous task of getting away.

Up here in her little one-room apartment, safe in the circle of his arms, she had forgotten for a time the outside world below; the man-made law that said if you sin and repent, you must pay just the same.

"Sally." He was pacing up and down the floor nervously, a frown on his brow, his mouth a sharp, straight line. "It isn't easy to say what I'm going to say. Promise me that you'll forgive me."

He stopped pacing, to stand in front of her, looking down with tortured eyes.

"I'll forgive you anything in the world," she promised.

And she really believed it at the time —before she knew.

HE sat down on the studio couch, then, and buried his head in his hands as if wracking his brain for some way to begin his confession.

She came toward him, her hands outstretched, all the love in the world shining out of her eyes. She would sit

beside him, and he would lay his head on her breast, and whatever it was, she would make the telling as easy as possible.

But something stopped her. It was the tramp of heavy feet on the stairs. And then someone was knocking. So fast and so loud it might have been the echo of her own terrified heart.

Knock. Knock. Knock. It was like the tattoo of death drums, beating the funeral knell of their love. It was sharp and incessant and inevitable, like the law it represented.

"Open the door!"

She threw him an appealing glance, and her white lips tightened noiselessly over the words, "the fire escape."

But he only shook his head, rose to his feet and came toward her. He patted her hand and said aloud, "Don't be afraid, little Sally. Everything's going to be all right."

It seemed suddenly as if he had turned into a total stranger. He walked to the door and opened it.

In a moment the room was flooded with people. The landlady, three policemen, a dark little foreign man, who pointed at Gus and talked excited, broken English. And more came racing and laughing up the stairs. Cocky young men in slouch hats with cameras and notebooks under their arms.

They pushed in ahead of the police and grabbed Sally by the arm.

"Here's the dame! There's always a dame."

Sally blinked and gasped in dismay as they took a flashlight photo of her, backed up at the end of the room against the gas range.

"You leave her out of this, smart guy!" Gus was a whirling, scrapping cyclone in the midst of the reporters.

"Watch the fire escape!" somebody yelled.

There was a flash of blue, and in a moment the police had handcuffs on him.

"No! No!" Sally shrieked. "You can't. I won't let you!"

Like a little wildcat fighting for her mate, she bit and scratched and kicked against that wall of blue.

"Sally! Sally—stop it!" It was Gus's voice, the only thing that could penetrate the terrible, primitive rage that had taken possession of her.

She caught a glimpse of his drawn face, and suddenly she collapsed on the sofa with a little sob. She wasn't helping him any. She was only making a fool of herself. Nothing could do any good, now. Not all her prayers; not all the tears in the world.

"Is this the guy you saw run up the fire escape right after the kidnaping?" one of the officers asked the foreign-looking little man.

"Yes, yes, I saw him plain. He ran up, and in an open window. The same yellow hair, and long in the legs. I had my push cart by the Palace trying to get through the crowd."

"Okay, Tony." The officer shut him off.

"He is a stranger to you, Mrs. O'Reilly?"

Sally's landlady sent her a withering look.

"Yis, and he is."

"That's all now. Get on your things there." The officer jerked his head toward Sally. "We're taking you along, too."

"Just a minute." Gus's voice was low, but steady.

"Well?"

"I suppose you're taking us to the police station for questioning about the Turner kidnaping."

"Smart guy," jeered one of the cops. "Any objections?"

"How do you know there *was* a kidnaping?"

"Well, the guy's gone, ain't he? Come on. Quit stalling!"

"Gordon Turner was not kidnaped," stated Gus quietly, looking directly at Sally. "There's been a mistake. I can prove it—because I am Gordon Turner."

THERE was a hush. Then one of the reporters broke it with a laugh. "Nuts!" he said.

"Listen, I'm not so sure about that." The one who had taken the flashlight picture of Sally pushed his way to Gus's side. He took a long look at the prisoner's face, and then broke into excited speech.

"He's right, and we're all crazy. I interviewed him today. He was slapping water on his hair, then, to take out the marcel. Most of his make-up was off, too. It was dim in there, or I'd have noticed before. Just to prove it—What was the first question I asked you today, Mr. Turner?"

Sally didn't hear the exact words of

A crash like the crack of doom broke in on Sally's thoughts. She looked up, her heart in her mouth, to see a young man sprawling in the middle of her carpet, a trail of dirt and broken flower pots leading from him to the fire escape

his answer, but she didn't have to. Evidently it was satisfactory. So was the comparison of his handwriting with the autograph the reporter had promised his girl friend. On the strength of it, they took off the handcuffs. The world had gone stark, staring mad, and Sally St. John alone was sane.

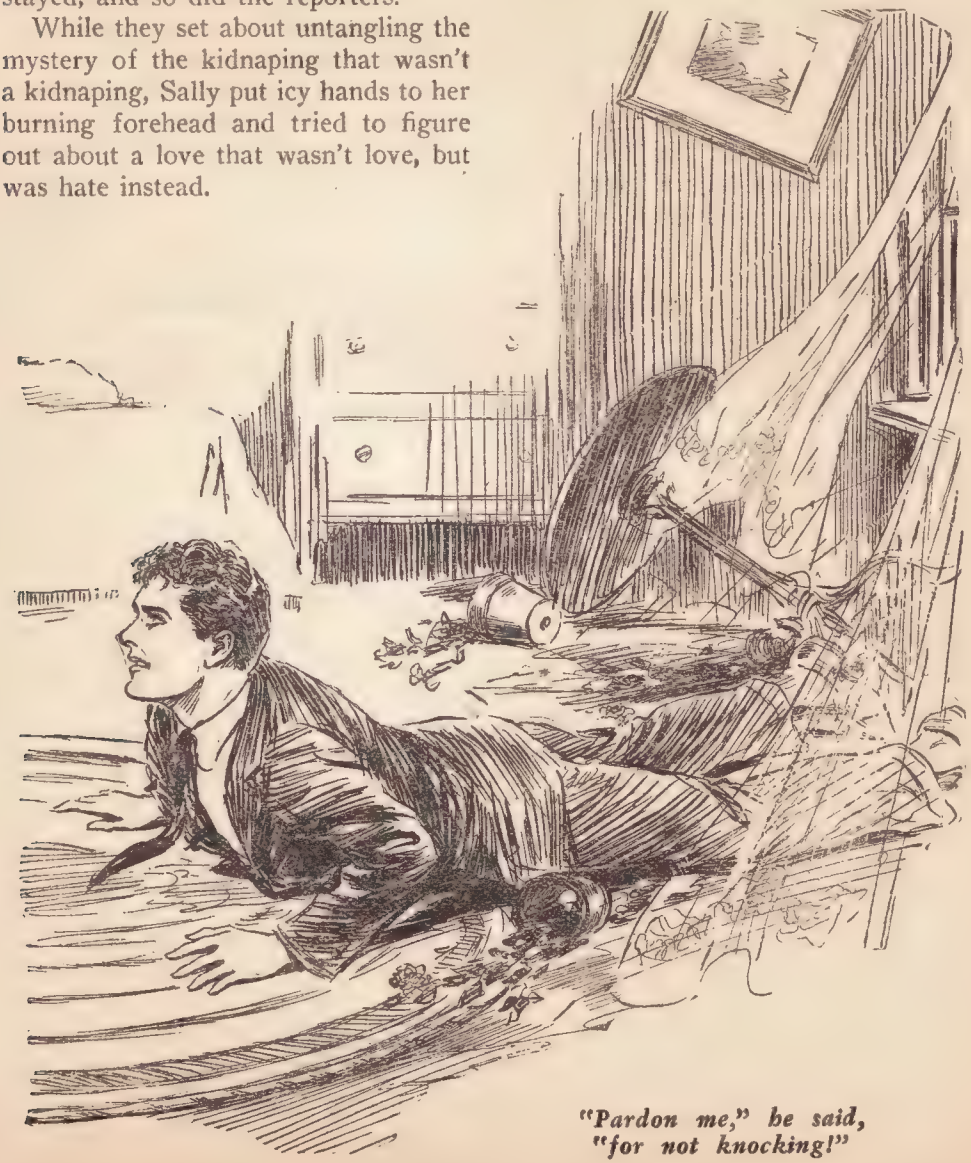
Mrs. O'Reilly and the little foreign man slipped away. But the police stayed, and so did the reporters.

While they set about untangling the mystery of the kidnaping that wasn't a kidnaping, Sally put icy hands to her burning forehead and tried to figure out about a love that wasn't love, but was hate instead.

When Gordon came to her finally and put his arms about her, she did not resist. She only looked at him blankly and said over and over, "I don't understand. I don't understand."

"I'm sorry, Sally," he said simply. "I was going to tell you, just before they came. It was hard, then. Now it's ten times worse."

He was standing beside her, facing



"Pardon me," he said, "for not knocking!"

the room full of men as he told his story.

"It was the women," he grinned. And the room full of understanding males grinned back. "They get me down. Kidnaping threats don't scare me, but whenever I see a bunch of women like that gang out in front of the Palace, I get cold feet.

"Today I made up my mind I'd fool 'em. I changed suits with one of the men backstage, took out the marcel my contract puts in my hair, and beat it out the stage entrance. It wasn't hard to get over the wall and into this alley. But then I found the line blocked—the end of the alley, too. I started to climb the wall again, but the crowd had broken in and were up around the stage door, so I couldn't get back in the theater. I was caught, either way, so I ran up the fire escape and climbed in here.

"I suppose it's natural enough that, when I didn't show up at the hotel, my secretary should phone the police. I was so anxious to escape that mob, I forgot all about those kidnap threats. I'm sorry, gentlemen, but that's all."

"Oh, no. That isn't all, Mr. Turner." One of the reporters smirked knowingly. "How come you stayed here all day with this girl? On the stove is the beginning of a nice little supper, and the table is set for two. Over on that chair there's a suitcase, half packed. More here than meets the eye, Mr. Turner! You owe it to your public to come across."

"Whatastory! Whatastory!" Someone behind him whisked out a pencil and began to scribble furiously.

Gordon turned to Sally with an apologetic smile. He shrugged his shoulders.

"I'm sorry, dear. Tell 'em we're engaged, and get rid of 'em."

SALLY looked at him through lowered lashes. Impersonally she studied his face. Straight light hair marceled; a Cupid's bow outlining his quite ordinary mouth; a dark dab for a cleft in his chin; black mascara for his light lashes and brows. With grease paint, lights, good clothes, glamour—he was Gordon Turner, all right.

Now he was playing a polished gentleman; a half hour ago he had been a gangster, talking slang—winning her love. It was all very clear.

A sob caught at her throat. He was even lower than she had thought him.

He had stumbled into her room and found her, the only girl in the world who frankly despised him. He had fallen right in with her foolish mistake, and to satisfy his loathsome vanity had made her love him. He had kissed her lips over and over, and she had been willing to sacrifice everything in the world for his worthless love.

He was even willing to go through with this mockery for more publicity to top his fake kidnaping. And after it had all died down, he would laugh at her and go his way. Laugh, as he must be doing right now, inside.

All these thoughts chased each other in maddening circles through her head, so that she grew sick and dizzy with the poison of her hatred. She looked up and saw that they were all waiting for her to speak.

"I am engaged to a man named Gus Hegersheimer," she said significantly, "not Gordon Turner. So you see you've made another mistake."

"Sure, we know," laughed the reporters. "Gus Hegersheimer's his real name and Gordon Turner's his stage name, but it's all the same guy. Can't blame him. Who ever heard of a great lover named August?"

"So your name is really Gus after all," she said through twisted lips. "Well, well! You can tell the truth once in a while, can't you?"

But the reporters were asking so many questions at once that he only caught a few of the words. She looked up at his beaming face and saw that he had no idea she wasn't going to keep on playing the fool.

In a minute, when the terrible beating of her heart subsided a little, she would tell him what she thought of him. She'd give these reporters their money's worth. In a minute she would.

But she didn't. For suddenly she thought of something even better.

Why not let the story go through for the morning papers, and then jilt him before he had a chance to do it to her? "Waitress Jilts Great Lover—Calls Him Flop," the next day's headlines would read.

She'd go where he couldn't find her, and then she'd wire the papers and offer to sell the story to the highest bidder. She might make a fortune. She might get an offer to go on the stage. And she'd take it, too!

"How does it feel to be loved by Gordon Turner?"

"To be loved by Gordon Turner," she laughed shrilly, "is the most wonderful thing in the world!"

"I've got to report at the police station, honey." Gordon was drawing her away, trying desperately to whisper a few words that wouldn't go on record. "I'm going to phone Hollywood myself and explain as best I can. After that I'll go to my hotel and dress for the broadcast. Tonight belongs to Mrs. Rigby.

"But, honey, I promise you it'll be the last night. I'll cancel the tour and the broadcasts for a month. We'll go to Canada, or Bermuda, or anywhere you say. Sally, my dear, look at me."

She raised her chin reluctantly and steeled herself against the depths of those blue eyes.

"I did it because I wanted to be loved for myself alone. At first it was a joke, I admit, and then suddenly it was the most wonderful thing that had ever happened to me. You said that you would forgive me anything in the world. Tell me again that you do. Tell me, now, before I go to broadcast, so that I can sing for you alone. Oh, my darling—" his voice broke. "Tell me that you'll be waiting for me when I come back."

Sally dropped her eyes. "Sure," she lied. "Why not?"

He left, then, and the others with him.

SHE looked around the room when they had gone. Mechanically she began to straighten furniture and pick up cigarette butts. She opened the window and let in great drafts of cool night air. She didn't cry. Perhaps tomorrow or the next day she would cry, but not tonight.

All her tears were frozen in a lump in her breast where her heart used to be. She had only one thought, one purpose to direct her shattered life: revenge, and then oblivion in some strange city.

She finished packing and left her rent, with a note, for Mrs. O'Reilly. She couldn't bear to talk about it just now.

At the Epicure, she collected her salary and said goodby. No one commented, because in that restaurant people were hired and fired, and quit and came back, every day.

She reached the bus terminal, just as the girl behind the magazine counter tuned in on KLB, one of the local

stations that went on a national hook-up at eight o'clock. She was standing in line at the ticket window when the broadcast began. The announcer was saying something about a big mistake and a wonderful surprise and then:

"Mrs. Rigby's Headache Tablets now bring you the silver tones of Gordon Turner."

A magical hush, the soft opening strains of "L'amour Toujours L'amour" and then—His Voice!

He was singing, "Oh, love, at last I've found thee—"

Sally covered her eyes. The voice went on and on, and she couldn't turn it off. This time she had to listen.

Then he was speaking. Not the stilted phrases he used to describe the merits of Mrs. Rigby's remedy, but his own—Gus's way of speaking.

"That was for you, Sally, from the bottom of my heart. I want all the world to know how much I love you—how much I need you, dear."

"How much I love you, how much I need you, dear."

The words echoed and reëchoed in Sally's heart. Drowned out the raucous jazz that poured from the radio as the man behind the cigar counter turned the dial.

Gordon was a famous star, and she was a poor, unknown waitress, yet he said he needed her.

Suddenly she saw that he wasn't bluffing or lying. Suddenly she saw that she had been all wrong.

Through the magic of radio, his voice had reached out after her; had struck just the chord in her heart that released a golden flood of love and forgiveness. She stopped fighting herself and her love, and let the tide turn.

Hate was love in reverse. Gus Hegersheimer—Gordon Turner. The voice over the radio had merged them miraculously into one being: the man she loved.

Of course he needed her! Through a strange twist of fate, he had found the one girl in a million who loved him for himself alone.

Not for his fame or his money, the tones of his voice or his glamorous artificial screen personality. He had tested her love and found it solid gold.

Frantically Sally looked at the clock. Would he reach home before her and find the apartment dark, empty, locked against him? She thought of the horrible, vindictive note that was waiting for him, and shuddered.

The girl in front of her moved up a step. She was grumbling because someone had turned off Gordon Turner.

"Say, who do you suppose Sally is? I never heard him talk like that before. Some swell society girl, maybe. Sally. Sally who?"

"Whoever she is," Sally laughed a little tearfully, "she's the luckiest girl in the world, you can be sure of that!" And then, excitedly, "Can you give me two nickels for a dime?"

A dark-haired little girl with a bright red hat and short gray jacket stepped out of line at the ticket window and ran a breathless, zigzag course to the nearest telephone booth.

Some people noticed her because her lips were almost as red as her hat. Some people noticed her because her eyes were like stars. She didn't even bother to shut the door or look up her number.

There was the clatter of a nickel, and a little click as she dialed.

"Give me Radio Station KLR!" she cried. "And, operator—please, please hurry."

Stowaway Kiss

By HORTENSE McRAVEN

She tried to ground her winged heart, because she thought it was the way to please a man

"FOR the luvva Mike," a man's voice said. "What's this hiding near my bunk?"

Peggy giggled excitedly but very softly, and cuddled closer on the floor of Dolph Norton's tiny compartment on the big ship.

He had come sooner than she'd expected—Lieutenant Adolph Norton, U. S. N.—tall and capable in his new

blue uniform as he made a final round of inspection before sailing.

"It's only one of those kittens Molly found while we were in port," answered Ensign Jones, hurrying aft.

The light cruiser, *Pensacola,* was in the colorful throes of the last thirty minutes before putting to sea. She would make a brief stop at Annapolis, and then go South for the brilliant winter maneuvers off Cuba.

It was visitors' day, and mothers and wives and best dates had been strolling about the decks with the boys in uniform.

The bugle sounded to clear the ship of everyone not on duty. Dolph Norton was staring at the bundle in the corner.

"Kitten, my eye! Blow me down if it's not a girl. A girl in sailor's pants and a cap pulled over her face. Here!" Louder. "Come out, you nervy little so-and-so! Don't you know you've no business in officers' quarters?"

He reached a determined muscular arm toward the bundle, and pulled out —Peggy. Daring, vivacious Peggy Ellison. Only, Dolph didn't know yet who she was. To him she was only a girl with a dirty face and hair strained back under an old jack-tar cap.

His very blue eyes flashed, and his mouth made a stern line above the nick in his good-looking chin.

"Come into the light. Let's have a look at you," he commanded.

He drew her closer, pinioning her arms.

"Let go!" The nervy little so-and-so scratched Lieutenant Adolph Norton's hand more fiercely than one of Molly's kittens would have. Across the grime of a pointed gypsyish face, the girl's mouth was a scarlet gash. Her dark gray eyes smoldered at him strangely.

"Not till you tell me how you got here and what you're up to. You might add your name and address to the other information," he said sternly.

"I slipped aboard with the other visitors, and I'm up to going to Annapolis with you. My name is Peggy; I'm twenty; and I work in the office of the Barnett Bonding Company. I heard this boat was shipping to Annapolis, so I thought I'd come along because I have a date for the Virginia-Navy football game and for the hop."

For a stunned moment, Dolph stared at the defiant little face.

"Well, I'll be everlastingly consigned to torment! What a screwy scheme! So you admit you're a stowaway, do you? Don't you know you can't get by with that?"

Pleading gray eyes widened in the silken thicket of dark lashes, and stared dejectedly at the Philadelphia harbor.

"I'll be very good. I've got to meet my date. He's the tops and—"

"Can't be done," snapped Dolph. "Not on one of Uncle Sam's battleships. Even a lady louse couldn't hide here."

"Do you mean to call me—"

"I'm not calling you half you deserve. You smarty little working girls make me tired. Talk about the poor little rich girls. It's the spoiled little poor girls that own the earth. I once fell for one, so I'm through for life.

"You thought you'd get a free ride, did you? A thrill to tell the boy friend about? It's a Federal offense to be caught prowling around warships. I should turn you in and have you jailed."

As he paused for breath, the smudged, pointed face looked up at him with much the same helpless look as Molly's kittens had.

"I'll let you off, if you'll scram while the scramming's good," he offered.

The helpless look left the stowaway's face. She lifted a determined little chin and said:

"Oh, I was just leaving, anyway. I wouldn't ride on your old boat for worlds."

Halfway up the ladder, she turned.

"But how can I meet my date?" she asked the young man. "I had the money saved, and gave it to my kid sister, Babs, when she lost her job. I've got to get to Annapolis, if I have to walk every step of the way. I'd give everything I ever hope to have for just one dance with him. Listen, mister, haven't you ever been in love?"

There was a sudden huskiness in the voice of the girl who called herself Peggy. She was very near the lieutenant. The silken thicket of lashes was wet, sparklingly wet. One lone tear went careening down to settle at the curve of lips that might have been tempting had their surroundings been cleaner.

"Here, quit that." Dolph was staring strangely at the tear.

"Yes, I've been in love. But there's nothing to it. Better skip it."

"I can't. I love him terribly. I'm going to that dance if I have to get out on the highway and hitchhike."

They reached the deck, but the other officers were too busy to notice Dolph's odd-looking guest. He drew Peggy behind a smokestack.

"Here, you can't hitchhike. It's dangerous for a pretty girl. At least, I suppose you would be pretty if you washed your face. If you're so dead in love with this fellow at the Academy, take this and go on the train. And do be more careful."

Peggy stared at two twenty-dollar bills he'd pressed into her hand.

"I—I can't take this."

"You've got to," he said sternly. "Laugh at me if you like. Call me old-fashioned. Anyway, I hauled you out of hiding, so get along to your boy friend's arms. Shove off with that last load of visitors."

"I—I'll pay you as soon as I'm in funds. You're—sweet," she told him.

Soft impulsive arms went about Dolph's neck, a pliant body curled close against his. And before he could move, the stowaway had kissed him. Warmly and deliciously. Full upon the lips.

A strange light went flaming through his sea-blue eyes. The mouth that had just been kissed, quivered. Slow color surged to his face.

"You spoiled, forward little brat! You go around kissing strange men, do you, just for the sensation? Somebody ought to teach you a lesson!"

He seized her wrist and gave it a smart slap. Like a teacher punishing a pert, naughty child.

Peggy backed away. Her wrist stung, but not for worlds would she have rubbed it.

"You liked that kiss," she said slowly, furiously. "That's why you're so mad. I'll make you beg for another—at Annapolis, dear Lieutenant Adolph Norton!"

He ran after her. "Here—how do you know my name?"

The bosun's pipe sounded. Bugle call to quarters. Men in uniform fell into place on the big ship like pieces in a picture puzzle. Lieutenant Norton snapped to attention.

A faint laugh of derision floated back to him. The disheveled little stowaway who had kissed him had gone.

MARGARET ELLISON, nicknamed Peggy, got off the launch at the Philadelphia docks and stood gazing seaward. The gleam-

ing *Pensacola* was going full steam ahead.

She took off her cap, and her bright hair, released from bondage, bubbled into a thousand irrepressible curls. That hair was the color of ripe chestnuts from the sunny side of the tree. With it blowing about her gypsy face, she was instantly different from the gamin of the boat.

"Bully! Caveman! Girl beater!" she exploded, shaking a fist at the disappearing ship. "It was you I had a date with, only you didn't know it. To think I ever imagined myself in love with *you,* just from your photograph in Angela Cary's college room.

"To think I slipped on the boat to see you, and actually wrote Smokey Lewis I'd come to the dance at the Naval Academy, because Dolph Norton would be there.

"I was willing to dare anything, risk anything, just to dance with you, be held in your arms. Oh!" she broke into her own thoughts, her face red with shame. "Just wait till I meet you at Annapolis, charming lieutenant. Peggy Ellison is not accustomed to being slapped when she offers her lips to a man."

She caught a street car, and sat with hands deep in the pockets of the sailor pants. She planned revenge on Dolph all the way home.

It made her burn, now, to remember how she used to slip into Angela's room, to look at his photograph — so straight and tall in uniform. With those steadfast eyes, and lips that didn't quite smile above the funny little nick in his chin. She used to sit dreaming at her window after lights-out bell. Dreaming in white moonlight of what she would do if she could meet him.

When she'd heard that Angela had broken with him, she had dashed into this mad scheme of hiding on his boat, to meet him in a way that was startling. Fool, fool that she'd been. Well, she was cured of loving Dolph Norton, forever, now.

She slammed the door of the shabby house in the suburbs which was the Ellisons' present home, and tossed her borrowed cap in the direction of the hall tree.

She looked distastefully about her. The usual signs of a quick getaway. "Out having a good time" was the family motto. Why couldn't they live in order and quietness like other people? Dolph's tiny cabin had been spotless; he himself immaculate—

She set her lips and refused to think about him. She straightened the rug that slithered across the floor, and roused the dog from his nap on the living room couch. Sighing, she went upstairs.

Her sister Babs was lying in the bed watching lazy smoke rings float ceilingward.

"Babs, you've burned the pillow cases again," said Peggy wearily. "Where's everybody?"

"All seven of 'em gone to the air races."

"They would be!" burst out Peggy. "This family can have the latest type radio when there aren't enough dishes to go around. They can own an airplane and go jaunting around the country in it when we live in a shack of a rented house!"

"What's the matter with you, Pegs? Pining for a better place to entertain Dolph? Did you meet him, and was he so very gorgeous? How did your crazy scheme work?"

"I met him," said Peggy angrily. "Hid in the corner by his bunk. Of course, I didn't really hope to get to Annapolis on the boat. I was going

to tell Dolph I knew Angela, and try to find out whether he still loves her. But after he slapped me—"

"*Slapped* you?"

"Cross my heart and hope to die if he didn't." Peggy stepped from her sailor pants and stood slim and beautifully rounded, in silk undies. "I kissed him and he slapped my hand. Hard."

Babs shouted with laughter, her yellow curls trembling. "Well, of all quaint things. Reversed on you, did he? Naughty girl kisses boy. Boy spanks. Peggy, it served you right. You're always too downright in going after your man."

"I play fair, Babs. You know it. I never made a move to meet Dolph while he was engaged to Angela, even knowing that she'd never make him happy. You've seen her sort. Starry eyes, dimpled elbows, a lisp in her voice. And a lisp in her disposition, too. Men go mad, simply mad over Angela.

"She's not a promiscuous petter. She's too smart for that. But they tell me if she once kisses a man, he never forgets. The bitter way Dolph spoke of love just now, I think he's suffering from a hangover of Angela. I thought for a while I'd go on to Annapolis, to punish him. But what's the use? My trip is off."

"Wha-at? Don't be a quitter. I'd go or perish on the way."

"No use. Good thing Smokey is only a cousin. He can get another girl to go with him. I wouldn't stand a chance with Dolph. I'm not the demure, angelic type."

"You could pretend to be," said Babs excitedly. "Do it, Pegs. You're a swell actress. Always grand in amateur shows."

Peggy was staring at a red mark on her wrist. "I lied, Babs, if I said he isn't gorgeous! He is! Eyes, bluer than blue. Hair, blacker than black. And his mouth —sweet and angry looking at the same time, above that funny little nick in his chin. Babs, he really should be punished for that slap."

She rose and dashed for the shower.

"I'm going shopping for a dress as smooth as honey and as lovely as the dawn. One of those timid little dresses that will shrink away from my shoulders and keep him guessing." Her laugh, half tender, half mocking, rippled out. "And I'm going to pay for it with his own money!"

Babs' round eyes peeped around the shower curtain. "Now," she whooped, "you're talking like a real Ellison!"

WHEN Peggy stepped from the train at Annapolis, the band was playing. And everything was keeping step with the band. Flags flying, wine-like autumn air with the thrill in it that said, "We're going to have a lulu of a football game tomorrow, and as for the hop—"

"I look like a wise-eyed nun," said Peggy to her image in the train mirror. "No one would think I'm assembled from all the Ellisons' costumes. Babs' suit, Mom's hat, my own shoes and blouse. I always said the family was clever to buy the same color. What a lucky break it was soft gray this year!"

Smokey had come to meet her, looking awfully important as a first year man. Peggy was about to fall upon him with her usual yelp of joy, when another uniform stood out to her startled glance. Dolph was there, in the midst of a gay crowd.

Peggy looked at him, and the station, the taxis, the distant ships in the harbor, all stood upside down. She was stricken dumb. The shout died in her throat.

She forgot to act shy, but shy she

was, in a little suit of dove gray. Her faun-colored eyes were enormous in her pointed, gypsyish face.

She kissed Smokey, one eye watching for the effect on Dolph.

Apparently there wasn't any.

"Come meet these folks." Smokey, with his infectious grin, was dragging her straight to Dolph's crowd.

First, there must be salutes—navy courtesy, Peggy knew. And then she was being presented to Lieutenant This and That.

"Margaret Ellison, my little cousin and date—" That was Smokey's voice, coming through the roaring in Peggy's ears. Then she found herself lifting her gaze from the gold braid on Dolph's uniform, up, up, to Dolph's sea-blue eyes.

What would he say? Or do? She dared not breathe.

"How do you do?" said Lieutenant Adolph Norton, with a formal bow.

He didn't know her! He hadn't recognized her, minus the grime.

A flame of admiration leaped into his look, turning Peggy weak. He liked Margaret Ellison as much as he had loathed the dirty gamin who had kissed him. Margaret Ellison, demure in nunnish gray.

"Good old-red-headed Smokey," she said, as she and Smokey started toward Carvel Hall. "Do something nice for little Peggy? When I get home, I'll send you a chocolate cake high as a mountain if you'll call me 'Margaret' and treat me as an adult while I'm here."

"Oh, ho." Smokey pinched her ear. "Dolph must have you hopping. Going demure, are you? It can't be done, old girl. I've seen pictures of Dolph's home in the South. Proud old manor; magnolias in moonlight; all that sort of thing. And his mother—white hair, young face, quiet manners. *That* sort of thing. Look at the scrambled life you Ellisons lead! Much as I love you, Pegs, I don't believe you could ever make the grade."

Tears shone on Peggy's lashes. "Oh, Smokey! I *hate* the way we live! I'm tired of being a romp. Besides—" She clenched her teeth. "I've got to punish Dolph Norton for something."

"You can't punish Dolph. He'll probably never know you're on earth. I think he's still goofy about Angela. Besides, once an Ellison, always an Ellison. You'd be sure to bust out somewhere and spoil the whole thing."

Smokey was right. Peggy admitted it bitterly, alone in her hotel room after Smokey had gone to drill. Magnolias in moonlight—and there was her home, with pipes and golf sticks and collies gloriously mixed. Ted barging in with four extra boys for dinner—Babs slipping out at the last moment to the delicatessen for boiled ham and potato salad—

Then she thought about the little nick in Dolph's chin, and knew she could not give up. She'd show him a few little things.

FOR two exciting days and nights, she used her room mostly for hurried changes as she dashed madly from one date to another.

Who wanted to sleep when everything was keyed to the highest pitch? Surrounded with the glamour of navy romance—boys marching, marching—colors rippling to the breeze—marine band playing. From morning reveille, thin and clear, almost till morning reveille again, Peggy was on the go.

Smokey's friends were grand to her, but Peggy laughed wickedly to herself as Dolph kept coming back for more "punishment." She marked secret "X's" in her diary beside the dates with

him. Dance in Sailor's Loft. Luncheon at the officers' club. The football game, with Dolph shouting like a little boy. And the navy sweeping across Farragut Field to glorious victory.

Peggy was gone. She was Margaret now. Shyest of the shy. Helpless and demure. She remembered Angela's tricks, and tried them on Dolph. Told him of the fluffy omelets and cheese biscuits she could make. Well, that was true. All the Ellisons had to learn to cook from infancy, or starve.

She told him she had knitted the suit she wore to the game. And she had! But she never told him she was a whizz in an office, nor that she could manage anything from a broken down airplane to a wild bronco.

Oh, but it was hard. Hard not to jump into a motor boat and go scudding across the surf. Hard, when she saw the navy planes in lovely formation above, not to shout, "Come, lover, hop aboard, while I show the pilot how to go about flying the darn thing!"

No, she told herself, her cheeks flaming, she would make Dolph *want* to kiss her more than he had ever wanted anything. Then she would laugh at him, get even for that little scene on the boat.

He took her breath away, at dinner one evening at the officers' club. Charming and handsome in his glitter of blue and gold, he leaned across the table and said suddenly, "Do you know, I feel myself going off the deep end over you? But haven't we met before? Your voice seems familiar."

Peggy never could resist playing with fire. "On your ship, perhaps?"

"No," he said bitterly. "No one came to tell me goodby. No one except a bold little imp with a dirty face. After the experience I've had, I thought I was through with Sir Galahad stuff. But this tough child took me in. Handed me a sob story about a guy she loved. I know now she was only gouging my pocket. Just wait till I see her again!"

"Oh, you'll never see her again," Peggy said. "But why do you hate girls who work? They can't help having to work."

"Some can. I was engaged to a girl who left college to go into an office. Told me she was saving for our home. All she wanted was to get the men in that office fighting over her. Took me for a ride!" His young mouth twisted painfully. "It's home girls for me after this. Home girls like you."

The silken thicket of lashes went down. All at once, Peggy forgot about punishing Dolph. She didn't want to deceive him. She only wanted, desperately hard, to make herself the sort of girl he liked. To mold herself close to his heart's desire.

"A fellow gets to thinking," he went on, "on a long cruise. When decks are quiet and eight bells sounds and the stars of the Southern Cross blaze in the tropical skies. Navy loyalty means a lot to me. That's why I blew up, finding a girl hiding on our ship. I'm sorry to say I even slapped her hand."

"The impudent thing deserved it," said Peggy. Her heart added, "She loves the memory of that slap, now."

"I dream of the girl I want, too. She's got to be the kind who won't get mixed up with other fellows while I'm cruising. I almost see her in my dreams. Then she eludes me. You are like her, and yet—"

"Yet you aren't sure," finished Peggy, forcing her voice to steadiness. "That means you're mistaken. I'm not the girl for you."

He can't forget Angela. The words

throbbed through her numb pain. Angela stands between us like a seductive ghost. I'm sorry I ever met him. It hurts worse now than it ever did before.

That night she had a few hours' sleep. And she slept with the wrist he had slapped, tucked childishly under her wet cheek. Her eyes were fixed till the last on the harbor where the *Pensacola* rode at bay. Soon the ship would bear him away from her forever.

There were two days more. And a great many things can happen in forty-eight hours. Next morning, the sun and sea made such a rhapsody of blue that hope awoke like golden bubbles deep within her.

There was the hop tonight, for which she had saved the Supreme Dress. Tomorrow, Dolph had planned an airplane trip for just the two of them, over the Chesapeake.

She'd caught her breath when he said, "I'll rent a plane. I've a pilot's license, for I once went in for aviation."

She sighed tremulously as she slipped the dress over the glory of satin-smooth curls. It was perfect—a drift of misty stars on white mousseline. And it was demurely tied with a blush rose sash. It was a poem of a dress; a Strauss waltz dress. A dreamy, dancing-in-the-moonlight dress. It whispered of love words, spoken low It smelled of white violets—

Peggy lifted her head. There were white violets in the room. A maid had entered with a box, and with trembling fingers she tore it open. Then those fingers clenched as she read *Smokey's* card:

> For a girl who is going demure. You've won the first round of firing, kid. Hold everything and don't give up the ship.

AFTER what seemed hours, she was in flag-draped Dahlgren Hall, as close to heaven as she ever wanted to be. There were other people there—lots of them—but she had eyes only for Dolph.

She had to wait a moment until her breath came back, before she could speak to him. He was dressed in evening blues, no brighter nor truer than his eyes. There were gold epaulettes on his broad shoulders.

"You're a love in that dress," he whispered. "An innocent looking, gypsy baby-love." Laughing, he held her away from him. "I see I'm going to 'float a femme' tonight."

"What does that mean, Dolph?"

"Navy slang. Means I'm dragging a popular girl. The stag line will mob us."

They did. And it was fun.

Then they were dancing together, and it was as if they were enclosed in a shimmering cocoon of silver threads that Peggy had neither the power nor the desire to break. They were dancing together, and the mauve and amber moon came through the windows and made a path of glory for their feet. They were dancing together, and his arm about her was unspeakably sweet.

Suddenly he said, "Come outside, Margaret, where we can talk. There are things that we must say."

What things? Had she made him forget Angela at last? Peggy's throat felt tight as she followed him to a secluded bench in the shadow of a mounted gun. The breeze came gentle and pure from foam-crested water. The moonlight made a special smile for lovers on the features of old John Paul Jones' statue nearby.

Peggy felt a thrill of romance at the thought of being a navy man's girl, maybe a navy man's wife. Dolph was

looking at her, and something in that look sent a flush of ecstasy to the core of her being. She snatched at something to say. "Bab's new slippers are hurting my toes. That is, I mean—"

"You little darling." He was laughing down at her in tender amusement. Childishly, she kicked off the slippers and curled her feet under her. Then he must take off his coat to keep her warm, and she must share it with him. His shoulder was hard and comforting and masculinely strong against her side. From a distance came the beat of music, and overhead were the stars.

Peggy thought, "Presently he is going to tell me he loves me—kiss me. And if I should die the moment after, still I'll have had this hour. And I'll tell him about the dress being bought with his money, and he'll say it doesn't matter, when we love each other."

"Margaret!" He cupped her gypsy face in one strong hand, and her gray eyes were fixed trustfully on his.

"Little Margaret, I'm falling fathoms deep in love with you. So deep no soundings can measure it. But—"

The same look of bewilderment as before was on his face.

"Margaret, when a man and a girl get this far, I think they should be honest with each other. The first moment I saw you, my pulses leaped. I thought, 'This is *my* girl!' " He passed a dazed hand over his forehead. "I know it's crazy of me. I'm falling in love with you, but I can't seem to forget—"

"Another girl in your past?" Peggy's voice was jagged with pain. "Another girl's kiss?"

"Yes! No! I *will* forget. It's crazy, I tell you. You are my real girl."

His arms reached for her, but Peggy got up, and with fingers that trembled, picked up her dew-wet slippers from the grass. Little slippers which only an hour ago had danced so happily with him. This was the end. She knew it. He could never forget Angela's kiss.

She forced her head up proudly. "Listen, Dolph. It was like you—honest and fine—to tell me. I can be honest, too. I am not the girl you think. I'm not the girl for you. It's the rebound from the other girl, the romance of this wonderful place, which has made you think you love me."

She turned toward the music and laughter, now gone stale for her. She gave Dolph two cold little fingers.

"Goodby, and good luck," she said. "When your ship sails, and you're alone on the deck, you will get it all straight. And you will come back—to her."

She must go quickly, before those sobs rose and choked her. Before he saw the hot tears.

"Wait, Margaret!" His face was white in the moonlight. "Have you forgotten our airplane trip?"

"There's no use, Dolph. But I'll go for goodby."

He gave a strange cry at that, and had her in his arms. He was kissing her swiftly, urgently.

With a sob of pure agony at the burning touch of his lips, Peggy freed herself. Her eyes blazed, her mouth quivered with anger.

"You—you have no right!" she panted. "Do you think I have no pride? I won't have a half kiss! It must be your whole kiss or none! As long as you're remembering that other girl, never touch me again!"

She fled into the night.

NEXT morning, heavy-eyed and quiet, she went with him to Baltimore. She talked of everything except what was first in her mind.

Why, why must her hopes rise again? After all, he had kissed her. Suppose, while they were in the air, she could make him forget Angela?

Her heart leaped at the sight of the amphibian Dolph had chartered. Just to feel a good plane under her! At home in the air once more!

"Sure you won't be afraid?" He was smiling down at her.

She wanted to laugh aloud. She had shrieked with glee when dad took her "cloud riding" at the age of two; had been in every kind of aircraft invented. With Dolph she would travel to heaven's gates.

"Only a short trip, Lieutenant?" asked the field man. "We've telegrams advising of rocky weather ahead."

"Only circling the bay and so on," said Dolph confidently.

But Peggy's trained eyes didn't like the look of things. Dad had taught her to fly, and dad had known his flying.

She didn't like the murky feel of the air, nor the direction of the brisk gale which quickened every moment. She didn't quite trust the amphibian which the man was jockeying from the hangar. It was different from the crack navy planes. Her head on one side, she listened to the turnover of the motor. She opened her lips to tell Dolph it didn't click in tune. Then she shrugged wearily. What did it matter?

"It seems funny to climb into a cockpit with skirts on. That is, I should have on a movie outfit."

"You're very lovely," said Dolph, "in that short skirt and sweater. Is the big coat and cap I borrowed heavy enough?"

Lovely, Peggy's pulses kept repeating. But not so lovely as Angela.

Oh, well—soon she'd forget everything in the sheer joy of the air.

They left Baltimore behind, and skirted the picturesquely jagged shore of the Chesapeake. Far below lay the fleet, shining in the ghostly light of the gathering storm.

The angry cloud bank followed them. Dolph tried in vain to outrun it. A heavy fog drifted in from the ocean, and in an incredibly short time they were prisoners. They had been walled about with cloud formations which they could neither ride above nor dip under.

As the storm increased, Peggy's confidence in Dolph's flying increased. He was wonderful. But the odds were against him with a motor that was missing badly.

He shouted, "I feel like a dog, bringing you out in this gale. It's getting worse every minute. Try not to be frightened. I'm trying to get down under."

"Don't do that!" screamed Peggy. "I sighted sharp cliffs below. Flying blind like this, you'd crash one. Try, instead, for a landing in the bay."

"Impossible! Seas are running too high. We'd be pounded to pieces; drowned in less than a minute."

Peggy's fingers twitched. Her ears pounded with the sound of the missing motor. Suddenly, something inside of her snapped.

"Here, give me the controls. You take the radio for a while. You understand it better than I. Call the Navy Yard. Signal the Coast Guard. Give our location, and tell them we're sitting down in the bay."

He was staring at her aghast. "You must be crazy, Margaret. You can't fly this plane."

"Oh, so I can't? Watch me!" With a fierce twist of her body, she yanked the controls from him. "Get busy with the radio."

Something in her voice made him

obey. Both knew it was their only chance. To Peggy, it meant a chance to save Dolph. For her own life, she didn't care. She had ruined her last hope with him, anyway. He loved girls who were helpless, clinging. And she had snapped out of the rôle with a vengeance.

The plane responded to her touch, and her ear heard the limping motor grow smoother under her direction. As he took over the radio dial, an angry flush stained Dolph's face.

Well, she had lost him now. Smokey had said she'd lose out somewhere, and she supposed she had. The zoom, zoom of the wind, the mad delicious thrill of danger, had turned her into Peggy Ellison again.

Her face was streaked with grime, her lips swollen and hard with determination to fight the storm to the last thunderbolt. Her bright hair blew in madcap curls about her face. Until, with a swift gesture, she jerked it back and strained it tightly under her cap.

She was not simple. Nor demure. And most certainly she was not afraid.

"SOS." Dolph was signaling. "Lieutenant Norton calling. Amphibian number 426975 M X Q. Coast Guard stand by. Forced landing in bay, south-southeast Annapolis light. SOS—"

Peggy was flying as if inspired. She was a flashing-eyed spirit of the storm, riding on the shrieking wind, striding across the lightning's dart. Flying for Dolph.

Down—down—down. Not in a vertical dive, but slanting expertly, slicing the side of a cloud. Just as one would slice a piece of chocolate cake, she thought with a wry smile.

"Take—control now," she panted to Dolph. "You must make landing. You know better than I. Dangerous—"

The heavens seemed to split open. The lightning's flash and the thunderclap came at the same instant. There was one horrible moment of realizing that the plane's wing was on fire. Then the jar, the splash— Water, blessed water, in which Peggy wanted to sink, and heartbroken, rest in forever.

"MY, but it's funny," she heard herself saying in a choked voice, hours and hours later. "Awfully funny. I tried to be a lady for Dolph's sake, and I just couldn't. I tried to be helpless—hide my talent for flying. And I had to run into a whale of a storm. I broke loose. And I love him so. I wanted to make him forget that other girl's kiss. I'd have died to please him."

Her voice came past a lump in her throat. Hot tears kept coming. Then the air cleared, and she saw she was in the sick-bay of a ship. It looked like the same ship the stowaway had kissed Dolph on, long, long ago.

"Funny," another voice, chokey, like hers, was answering, "but I kept trying to love your lady-likeness. And all the time, I was remembering a dear little gamin's kiss. No sense to it. Something in me wanted a girl who was a bit of a romp and a bit of a reckless devil and a whole lot of a beautiful darling. Awfully—funny."

"Both you kids are groggy." That was Smokey's voice, all wobbly and relieved. "You don't know what you're saying."

Peggy's eyes opened. They slid past the ship's doctor, past Ensign Jones and Smokey. They came to rest on Dolph, on a cot beside hers.

Then the doctor disappeared. Smokey had turned his back on them, tactfully.

"Dolph," whispered Peggy, "I'm not Margaret. I'm Peggy. I work in an

office. I can ride a bicycle standing on my hands, and fly—"

"So I noticed, darling little nut," he said tenderly. "I love you for all those things, and not because you tried to be demure. I'll always love you, dearest dear, any way at all. Love you in star-dotted dresses, and in big, floppy hospital pajamas."

Flushing deliciously, Peggy pulled the sheet to her chin.

"B-but you don't like working girls. Your home is all magnolias and moonlight. And you couldn't forget Angela's kiss."

"You won't be a working girl after we're married. And who said anything about Angela's kiss? I got over her long ago. The kiss I couldn't forget was a grimy, heavenly one, from a gamin on my ship."

"That was *me!*" said Peggy, ecstatically, ungrammatically.

"So I discovered on the plane. And I'm dreadfully tired of magnolia-moonlight homes. I want a scrambled sort of apartment with you, where happiness doesn't mean speckless floors and silent rooms. Don't you think, darling, if I lean way over, you could manage to kiss me again?"

"I'll meet you halfway," said Peggy.

She leaned from the cot, and the floppy pajama sleeves fell away from round brown arms that crept about his neck.

His lips quivered with tender passion above the dear little, funny little nick in his chin. So it was that Peggy gave her own lips over to him, with enough kisses to stow away until eternity.

To a Modern Maid

IN ages past, when knights were bold,
Their ladies all were wondrous fair
(At least, so ancient writers told)
With midnight locks or spun-gold hair.

But when I gaze at you, I know
That no great lady's form or face,
Within those years of long ago,
Held more of loveliness or grace.

And could they swim, or sew, or cook
Delicious meals the way you can?
Or make a modest little nook
Appear like heaven to a man?

—Robert Avrett

His words burned her tortured ears. "I've got to marry her—I owe it to her. But I'll always love you"

Afraid of Love

By DOROTHY BARNSLEY

CONCLUSION

"DIANE FRAWLEY!" Sylva could not suppress the cry of horror which rose to her lips.

Frederic did not seem to notice. He went on, his voice bitter with self-condemnation, "It's a devil of a mess. I feel like a cad. I thought I was in love with her, till I met you. I'm fond of her, of course. Sorry for her, too. You see, when she was just a tiny thing her

father ran away with an adventuress."

Sylva's breath came sharply with a little quiver of pain. So that was what the Frawleys had called her unhappy mother. An adventuress! Frederic's kiss had made her forget the tragedy of Blanche Tremaine. Now all of her memories came back poignantly.

She was not looking at Frederic's face. She was staring again at the distant horizon, her hands gripping the rail for support until her knuckles were terribly white. His words burned her tortured ears.

"They ran away to Europe, and Diane never saw her father again. I don't know the details, but for fifteen years the Frawleys have been trying to live down the scandal. Old Mrs. Frawley has tried to keep it from Diane. I think she is afraid to this day that somehow the old story will crop up again, and possibly ruin the girl's social career."

Sylva's voice was tight in her throat. She was stalling for time, so that her dazed brain might think. It was an incredulous, impossible situation. Frederic, the man she loved, was the sweetheart of Diane Frawley!

She said, "What has this to do with us?"

"With us?" he echoed. "Diane's unhappy childhood was no fault of ours. But the present has plenty to do with us. Don't you realize what it means? She is expecting to announce her engagement to me, and I—love you!"

The words her heart had been waiting to hear him say. "I love you." It was unbearable that they should bring her such pain now.

She heard herself saying, "What are you going to do about it?"

"I'll tell Diane, of course. It's the fair thing to do."

It sounded so simple, as Frederic explained it. Diane's pride might be hurt, but surely it was better to hurt one person for a little while, than to ruin three people's lives forever? These things happened sometimes, he said. It was better to make a clean breast of the whole affair, and give everybody a fresh start.

Only Sylva, the daughter of the woman Diane and her family must hate —Sylva, who knew so much more than Frederic—was aware that it was not simple.

This was history repeating itself grimly. Frederic was planning to tell Diane frankly, "I'm very sorry, but I don't love you any more. I love Sylva Tremaine."

In much the same manner Alex Frawley, fifteen years before, must have told Diane's mother, "I don't love you any more. I love Blanche Tremaine."

The irony of it was more than Sylva could stand. Her body was torn with confused emotion. If only her rival had been any other girl in the world but Diane!

Because of the tragedy which involved them both, Sylva had felt a bond with Diane stretching across the ocean, almost as though they were blood sisters. She was traveling to America especially to see Diane, to return to this other girl the emeralds Alex had given to Blanche.

How would Diane receive her if she believed that Sylva had stolen Frederic's love? How would Frederic's family receive her? The proud Drewes, lifelong friends of the Frawleys, who had set their hearts on a marriage between Frederic and Diane.

Her face an expressionless white mask, she looked at Frederic. She knew that he would not understand what was passing through her mind. Perhaps

men never did understand things like this in quite the same way that a woman did.

Sylva saw with terrible clarity that in the case of a scandal it is invariably the woman who suffers most. Just as the Frawleys and the Drewes, even Frederic himself, had blamed Blanche Tremaine for what Alex Frawley had done, so would Sylva be blamed because Frederic loved her.

Would it make any difference to Frederic if he knew that she was the child of the "adventuress" who ran away with Diane's father? Would his love be able to stand the inevitable opposition of the society which was his world? This was her problem, and she had to face it.

Frederic's eyes were burning into hers, waiting for her to say something.

She said, "A few moments ago you told me that you thought you were in love with Diane, until you met me. If you were not sure of your love for a girl you've known all your life, how can you be sure of your love for me? You don't know me. We have spent only a few short hours together."

FREDERIC'S face looked puzzled. Then he laughed, and his tone became lighter. "How can I be sure that I love one woman, and not another? Can any man tell why he loves, or how he knows? Love just happens —you can't explain it.

"I'm going to be very honest with you, Sylva. When I met you that night in the storm I was intrigued because you were the Sylva Tremaine of whom I had heard so much. I wanted to know all about you, and I wanted to tell you about myself and Diane. But you didn't choose that things should be that way. You wanted to play your own game, and I played it with you. That was all it was at first. Then tonight, something happened. We found ourselves in each other's arms before we had a chance to know each other. That's love, Sylva, and that's all that matters."

He added in a gently bantering voice, "It's true that I still don't know a thing about you. We haven't cleared up the little mystery yet, have we? I have told you my story. Now it's your turn. Is it the Russian prince, or the American millionaire?"

She could not smile back at him. The very lightness of his tone made her feel unaccountably afraid. She said briefly:

"It's neither. But there *is* a story, not a very pretty one. I don't think you'll like it much."

She would have told him then. She would have told him everything. But there was an interruption. It was Julian Lamond's voice.

Julian was nearsighted. Sylva guessed that he saw first her sparkling midnight gown shining in the moonlight, and did not at once perceive the dark clothes of Frederic beside her in the shadows.

His voice was angry. "Sylva, I especially asked you to remain in the ballroom. Do you suppose I pay good money for gowns for you, so that you can moon about on a deserted deck in them? I want people to see you, and talk about you. I want—"

He stopped abruptly. Frederic had taken a swift step forward. Sylva's glance flashed from one man to the other. Frederic's face was tight, and suddenly menacing.

And Julian? She had always looked upon Julian as a man without emotion. What she saw registered in his face now came as a shock. It was something more than anger. Jealousy! Jealousy of the stranger at her side.

But why should Julian be jealous of

Frederic unless— Sylva tried to banish the thought. It was impossible that Julian, staid, businesslike Julian, could be in love with her. And yet why should he look at Frederic like this? The situation was intolerable.

Frederic's voice snapped. "What did you say?"

A cunning little smile curved the other man's mouth. "Sylva has no doubt told you that she is traveling under my—er—protection. Naturally I am interested in her activities. Shall I repeat what I said before? I pay a lot of money for her gowns. I expect her to show herself in the right places."

Frederic's face went ominously white. "Sylva has told me nothing. I don't believe it. You'll take that back or—"

The stricken girl stood between them, her eyes beseeching. But the two men were not looking at her.

Julian smiled. "I can't very well take back the truth."

Frederic smothered an oath. He leaped, and would have knocked the older man down, if Sylva's frozen body had not suddenly come to horrified life. She thrust herself before Frederic, keeping him from Julian.

She cried wildly, "You mustn't—you mustn't fight over me! You're so much bigger than he is. You might kill him. What he says is true, but you don't understand. I want to explain to you."

Frederic's raised fist dropped to his side. For just a second his stormy dark eyes burned into Sylva's with such a look of hurt incredulity that her heart was wrenched.

He said, "It's true? You're telling me that it's true? That this fellow—"

She turned to Julian mechanically. "Will you please leave us, Julian? I'll talk to you later."

She was alone again with Frederic, and the world was different. Even the moonlight seemed cold.

He said, "Well, Sylva?"

WHEN she did not answer immediately he asked, "Who is this man? What is he to you?"

Sylva turned her eyes. She could talk better when she was not looking at him. Her voice was toneless.

"He is Julian Lamond. He helped me when I was broke, and made me"—her lips twisted with irony—" the toast of Paris. He designs all of my clothes."

Frederic's words cut. "And also pays for them, and travels with you!"

She said dully, "Of course he pays for them. That's part of our bargain. I told you I was broke when I met him. But I'm not in love with him, if that's what you are thinking about."

Frederic said, "I didn't suppose you were. He's old enough to be your father. But he's in love with you. I could see it in his face."

Sylva winced. So Frederic had seen it, too. She shrugged weary shoulders.

"Perhaps he is. I don't know. I never thought about it, until tonight."

Frederic said, "What are you trying to tell me, Sylva? I remember Lamond now. He was the little man who was with you that night in Paris when you wore the gold dress."

Sylva nodded.

"Is Lamond," Frederic persisted, "the mystery you were so reluctant to speak about?"

"He's part of it."

He gave an exclamation. "So that's it! It was nothing so romantic as a Russian prince, or an American millionaire. Just a little Parisian dressmaker!"

The great Julian Lamond would have boiled to hear himself referred to as a little dressmaker. But Sylva was

not concerned with Julian's feelings just now.

Her eyes met Frederic's burning glance. In those few minutes his face had gone lined and older. All of the things she had meant to tell him about her mother, and Diane Frawley, and her own happiness, had been swept away by the interruption of Julian. She did not know what to say to him now.

She remembered that only a few minutes ago he had said boldly:

"We found ourselves in each other's arms before we had a chance to know each other. That's love, Sylva, and that's all that matters."

But love wasn't all that mattered. He was proving it now by his words to her; by the accusation in his eyes. She realized vividly that there must be many things in the life of Frederic Drewe which mattered to him, besides love.

He had held her in his arms, but a chance remark of Julian's had caused him to doubt her. He was doubting her now, even while he waited for her to speak. He had chosen to misunderstand her relationship with Julian, and she had not enlightened him. Probably he thought that she was Julian's mistress.

The thought caught Sylva sharply. With this doubt in his mind, how could she hope to explain to him the tragedy of her life? Her moment was lost.

How could she tell him that she had traveled in the company of Julian Lamond, living in the luxury he provided her, and returning him only the favor of wearing his gowns for the world to see?

Her relationship with Julian had been so fantastic that she could not expect anyone to understand it. Perhaps, she thought dully, that was the way he had intended it to be, meaning in his subtle way to keep her always for himself. And she, in her unhappiness, had fallen innocently into the brilliant web he had woven about her.

No, Frederic would never understand her. The world of the Drewes and the Frawleys—the world of society to which Frederic irrevocably belonged—had not understood her mother. They would not understand her mother's daughter.

Her mother had been right when she said, "Don't ever fall in love, Sylva. It hurts too much."

It hurt with a pain which was of the soul as well as the body.

Her first instincts about Frederic had been right. She had known that this one man, of all the men she had ever met, alone had the power to hurt her. She had fought against him, and in the end had capitulated to his kiss.

But the reckless ecstasy of that kiss had died at the mention of Diane's name. She had known in her heart that this strange new love of hers was something which could not be. She could not steal the man who had been Diane's friend and sweetheart since they were children.

She could hardly explain her reasoning even to herself. It was just something that she could not do, no matter what she might have to sacrifice.

It would precipitate a second scandal. It would rob Frederic of all of the material things which comprised his life. It would lead to eventual unhappiness for both of them. That was Sylva Tremaine's fate.

Frederic was still looking at her. "Isn't there anything you want to say to me, Sylva?"

SHE could not bear any more. She had suffered too much already.

Her dull calmness broke in a storm. She began to laugh. Laughter racked

her slim body far more than tears could have done. Her eyes were hysterically bright in her white face.

Frederic's face was terribly stern. He caught her shoulders, trying to hold her still.

"Sylva, don't laugh like that! There's nothing to laugh at. Sylva, stop it!"

With a tremendous effort she gained control of herself. In that moment she rose to supreme heights of courage.

"But there *is* something to laugh at, Frederic. It's all really very funny when you come to think of it. We have played our game, and now it's over. It was foolish to pretend, even for a little while, that it was real, wasn't it? I guess the moonlight made us forget ourselves."

Her too-bright eyes denied her love. Let him think that it had all been pretense. Let him think that she belonged to Julian. Let him think anything except the truth—that she was giving him back to Diane Frawley, the girl she had never seen, in a valiant attempt to right a wrong which happened fifteen years ago.

She lied bravely, "I've met men like you before, Frederic. Nice young Americans seeing the sights in Paris. They, too, were intrigued at meeting the Sylva Tremaine. My reputation fascinated them. They were flattered to be seen with me. But in the end it was always the same story. There was always a girl at home, waiting."

Her lips curved into a painted smile. "You, too, Frederic, will go back to your Diane. You will forget me, except as a fleeting incident in your past. That's life."

She added, "And I—I'll still be Sylva Tremaine. I shall go my own way."

There was a dramatic little hush of silence. Emotion struggled in Frederic's face so daringly close to hers. She knew that he was finding it hard to believe the careless words which fell from her lips.

He said at last in a taut, searching voice, "Is that all it has meant to you, Sylva? A game to be played, and forgotten?"

And she forced herself to answer, "That's all. It couldn't be any other way. We are a million miles apart, you and I."

His arms released her slowly. Her shoulders ached where his strong fingers had gripped. Standing alone, she swayed slightly on her feet.

Frederic straightened. The emotion was gone from his features, and harshness took its place.

"I'm sorry, Sylva. I suppose I've made a fool of myself. But you must be used to men making fools of themselves over you. If I have caused any trouble between you and your—er—friend, Lamond, please forgive me."

He turned on his heel and was gone.

BARELY an hour later, Julian Lamond asked Sylva to marry him. So much had happened this night that she was no longer capable of feeling surprise, or shock. She looked at him dispassionately.

"Are you in love with me, Julian?"

It was some seconds before he replied.

"I don't know, Sylva. Perhaps not, in the sense that a young man loves. I have never had time for love. The accumulation of a great business has been my one interest in life. I have employed many beautiful models, but so far as I was concerned they might just as well have been machines. You, my dear, are different."

He was standing with his hands in his pockets. "I have encouraged you to

be seen in the company of men." He gave his cunning smile. "Women wear my gowns, but it is the men who pay for them. It is good business to make friends with the men, too, and you have done it successfully. But I knew that you were not seriously involved with any one of them; I knew that I was in no danger of losing you, and that was all right.

"Then tonight— tonight when I saw you on deck with that man I had the queer feeling that everything was changed. I felt that this time it *was*

"I can see through your game now," said Diane furiously. "You thought Frederic was a good catch, so you plotted to break things up between him and me!"

serious. I was angry. I was even jealous of him, whoever he was. I made up my mind that, whatever the cost, I was not going to lose you to any man in the world."

He said directly, "I don't know if you call that love. The only way I can be sure that I shall never lose you is to make you my wife. So I am asking you to marry me. The House of Lamond needs you, Sylva, just as you need me and my money. Perhaps I am selfish in putting my business first, but I love my business. You are an important part of the House of Lamond, therefore I love you."

Sylva sat in a numbed silence. A few days ago, before her meeting with Frederic, she would have resented this conversation with every fiber of her being. Now it did not matter. She found herself listening with a curious sense of detachment.

She was emotionally exhausted from those moments in Frederic's arms. It was almost a relief to hear Julian talk so cold-bloodedly about his feelings.

Julian was surveying her keenly. "It is not a young man's passion I am offering you. But I have always had the idea that for some reason of your own you did not want a young man's love—that you were, in fact, afraid of it. If I am right, then your position as my wife might not be entirely disagreeable to you. It would be a protection."

A quiver shook Sylva. She got up abruptly, and began to walk back and forth. Oh, Julian was clever! He was almost inhumanly clever. In some uncanny way he knew her feelings and her fears as well as she knew them herself, and he was playing upon them.

He was right, of course. Frederic had said that he had made a fool of himself over Sylva. But that was not so. It was she who had made a fool of herself over him. Frederic had Diane and his world to go back to. Sylva had nothing, no one, but Julian and the House of Lamond.

What else was there for her to do but stick with Julian, and do what he wanted her to do? It would be a protection, as he wisely said—a protection from herself.

She would be true to him. She would be safeguarded forever from making a fool of herself over another man.

She ceased her pacing and said suddenly, "When do you want me to marry you, Julian?"

He rubbed his hands together with pleasure. "As soon as we return to Paris. It must be the right kind of a wedding, of course. I myself shall design the gowns for you and the bridesmaids. Your wedding gown, Sylva shall be my masterpiece. The whole affair will be a pageant which those who are fortunate enough to see it will never forget."

Sylva's lips twisted. Yes, Julian was clever. He would turn their wedding into a money-making enterprise; a lavish fashion parade which had never been equaled. Well, perhaps it would be a fitting beginning of the life she was to lead hereafter. Even as Julian's wife, her first duty would still be to model the gowns he created.

She said, "I'll agree to anything you wish. I have only one request to make. That we return to Paris as soon as possible. I have a duty to perform before I can feel—free. When that is over, I shall not want to remain in New York."

For just an instant her blue eyes clouded. "I feel that my home city is not going to like Sylva Tremaine very much."

Julian said, "We can return on the next boat if you wish."

SHE did not speak to Frederic again. She saw him just once, and that was during the excitement of landing.

Julian's press agent had done his work well. There were reporters and photographers to greet Sylva Tremaine. She stood in the midst of them, her classic beauty framed in a setting of soft furs. They fired questions at her.

But it was Julian who did most of the talking. Julian confirmed the story of their romance; told of the extravagant plans for their wedding, and of the gown which was to surpass in its extreme style anything that any bride had ever worn before.

Sylva preserved her bright smile, and said little. She caught a glimpse of Frederic through the crowds of people. There was someone with him. A girl who had evidently boarded the boat to greet him. A tall, dark girl with a proud face. Even in the distance Sylva recognized her from her newspaper picture. Diane Frawley!

She rushed into Frederic's arms, and it was then that his eyes met Sylva's, above the dark head of Diane. Something electrical seemed to play between them. Something which forced back memories, and yet spelled an irrevocable goodby. Frederic bent down to kiss Diane.

To Sylva, the boat seemed to rock. She was conscious of nothing going on about her. Then, through the welter of confusion in her mind, she heard a voice. It was one of the reporters, an older man, saying:

"Miss Tremaine! Your name sounds very familiar. Are you by any chance the daughter of Blanche Tremaine who eloped with Alex Frawley fifteen years ago? I was just a cub reporter then, but I remember the story."

The smile froze on Sylva's face. Julian answered for her. "Her mother was Blanche Tremaine." Publicity was to Julian's advantage, and he did not care how he got it.

More questions. "How do you think your arrival in New York just now will affect the engagement between Diane Frawley and Frederic Drewe, junior?"

Sylva's mind was dizzy. She remembered only saying in a wild voice:

"Don't ask me any more. Please—please let me alone!"

Ensconced in a hotel suite, she read the newspaper reports next morning.

"Echoes Of An Old Society Scandal."

"Daughter Of Blanche Tremaine Returns To New York After Fifteen Years Exile."

"The gossips are wondering just how the Frawley family will feel about the inopportune arrival of this glamorous 'ghost' from their past, on the very eve of the expected announcement of the engagement of Miss Diane Frawley to Frederic Drewe, junior, son of the famous banker. Can this surprise visit be a gesture of spite on the part of beautiful Sylva Tremaine? Sylva won't say. And efforts to reach any member of the Frawley family have been in vain. Both Mrs. Coningsby Frawley and her débutante grand-daughter are remaining in seclusion."

Sylva buried her face in both hands. She had not meant to start anything like this. The ball of publicity was growing and it would not stop. There was a complete re-hashed story of the tragedy of fifteen years before, embellished with a highly colored account of her own life on the continent, and her romance with Julian Lamond. There were pictures of herself and Julian smiling on board the ship.

It was all horrible and sordid. It would be a terrific blow at the pride of the Frawleys and the Drewes. No one would believe that Sylva had not done this deliberately. "A gesture of spite," as the tabloids put it.

No one would believe that she had tried to leave her reputation behind, and come simply as an unhappy girl seeking the friendship of another girl who was equally unhappy.

But she had got to make them believe it. Sylva brightened a little. When she returned the emeralds to Diane, the other girl would understand that she, Sylva, had not traveled three thousand miles to spitefully revive a dead scandal. Diane could not help understanding.

This thought kept up Sylva's spirits. Nevertheless, it was evening before she could bring herself to call at the palatial residence of Mrs. Coningsby Frawley.

The butler admitted her. Sylva saw his face change as she gave him her name. She guessed that all of the servants must have read the spicy newspaper stories, and possibly smiled behind closed doors over the embarrassment of their young mistress.

The butler said doubtfully, "I'll see if Miss Frawley is at home, Miss Tremaine."

It seemed an age that Sylva sat perched nervously on the edge of a chair. Then she heard the tapping of a stick against the polished floor.

OLD MRS. FRAWLEY was surprisingly straight for her years. She grasped her stick firmly in one hand and rested on it ever so slightly. Her hair was iron gray, and her eyes black and shrewd. Her mouth was thin, and not pleasant.

Sylva rose to her feet. "I am Sylva Tremaine. I—"

She got no further. The thin mouth of the old lady snapped. "I know who you are. You've got your mother's eyes. I've read about you in the papers. I suppose the whole of New York is laughing at us."

She stared at Sylva. "Like mother, like daughter," she pronounced. "You arrive here with your lover just as brazenly as your mother departed with hers fifteen years ago. Haven't we suffered enough from you Tremaines without this? What has my granddaughter done to you that you should want to hurt her?"

Sylva's face went white. But she would not allow herself to be cowed by the old lady's insults. She answered in a taut voice:

"I can't discuss my mother with you, Mrs. Frawley. If she was—unwise, she paid a bitter price for it. She didn't want to hurt anybody. Neither do I. I have come as a friend. I told the butler that I wanted to speak to your granddaughter. I have something I'd like to give to her."

Mrs. Frawley snorted. "There is nothing you could possibly give Diane that she would care to have. If you wish to prove your friendship the best way you can do it is to leave this country as soon as you conveniently can."

Sylva winced. She said bravely, "Don't you think that Diane herself might be a better judge of that? Perhaps she doesn't wish to be protected to that extent. What I have to give her is very valuable."

But the old lady was adamant. "Diane is busy entertaining her guests. Perhaps you don't know that we are announcing her engagement tonight?"

There was a little strained silence. So Diane was to become engaged to Frederic tonight? Then Frederic must be here, too!

Sylva's heart skipped beats. She fought with a sudden desire to go—to get away from this place quickly, lest by some mischance she might meet him again. Then conquered herself.

She had crossed the ocean for the sole purpose of returning to Diane the emeralds which rightfully belonged to the Frawley family, and she must not be dissuaded. She had the panicky feeling that if she left this house now, she would not have the courage to come back a second time.

She said, "I'm sorry. I'm afraid I'll have to ask you to allow me to wait. I won't make any trouble. It is imperative that I see Diane tonight."

But her stubbornness was unnecessary, for at that moment she heard a girl's voice in the hall outside, saying:

"What is it, grandmother? Is anything wrong?"

Diane Frawley came into the room, followed by Frederic. Sylva felt stunned. Her eyes registered a hundred things all in one confused glance. She saw Frederic staring at her incredulously. She tried not to look at him.

And the sight of Diane Frawley crumpled forever the proud purpose which had carried Sylva to America. For Diane was not at all the kind of a girl Sylva had imagined.

Sylva, lonely and unhappy, had pictured in her mind another girl like herself. Diane, lonely and unhappy, too, needing a friend. She had hoped to make friends with this girl, believing that such a friendship might help to break, for both of them, the memories of the old tragedy which had involved Sylva's mother, and Diane's father.

She saw now that her mission had been in vain. She and Diane could never be friends. Diane was looking at her coldly.

This daughter of Alex Frawley's was the youthful image of her father. She had the same wilful chin, and selfish mouth. Alex had been fascinating, but cruel. Sylva suspected that his cold-eyed daughter could be the same.

Old Mrs. Frawley said, "This is Sylva Tremaine, Diane. She says she has something she wants to give you."

Diane's mouth curled. A tiny gesture which reminded Sylva forcibly of Alex.

She said deliberately to Sylva, "You have given me enough already—unpleasant publicity which I shall have difficulty living down. Can't you be satisfied?"

Sylva forced herself to speak. "The unpleasant publicity was not my fault. I came here to bring you—"

She stopped short. Not until then did she notice the emerald necklace Diane was wearing, and she wondered dully why she had not seen it as soon as the other girl appeared. The necklace which adorned Diane's slim throat was the exact counterpart of the one Sylva was carrying in her handbag!

SYLVA'S bewildered glance embraced them all, even Frederic. She said:

"There's something I don't understand. I came here to bring you a necklace which I believe is an old Frawley heirloom. Your father, Diane, gave it to my mother when—he left her. He told her that it was worth a fortune and would keep her in comfort for the rest of her life. But my mother refused to sell it. She always felt that it rightfully belonged to you. So—"

She finished simply, "I have brought it to you."

She took the necklace from her bag and laid it on a small table. Her eyes strayed again to the emeralds Diane was wearing. There was a long moment of silence, and then Sylva spoke

again. Her voice, to her own ears, sounded strange.

"I didn't know there were two of them."

Diane's mirthless laugh broke the tension. "Two of them?" she echoed. "Of course there are not two of them. The necklace I am wearing is the only emerald necklace in the Frawley family. This—"

She indicated the sparkling circlet on the table, "This one is obviously an imitation. You must have known that. You couldn't possibly have thought that it was really worth a fortune. What *I* don't understand is—why should you have used such a cheap ruse to gain admittance into this house? If you are trying to make any further trouble—"

Frederic made a sharp movement. "You're not being fair, Diane. I am quite sure that Sylva did not come here to make trouble."

For the first time since their stormy parting on the ship's deck he was face to face with Sylva, his eyes meeting hers with a curiously compelling glance.

He said, "There is no doubt, Sylva, that the necklace Diane is wearing is the genuine Frawley heirloom. This one, I think, is a fairly good copy, but of practically no real value. There must have been a mistake—on somebody's part."

Bright spots of color flared in Diane's face, but her voice was like ice.

"You two know each other?" The words were an accusation.

"We met on board ship," Frederic answered briefly.

"You didn't tell me."

Sylva could see the tired lines about his mouth. "I didn't think it was necessary, Diane. It was—finished."

Fury trembled in Diane's voice. "But she wouldn't let it stay finished!" She turned on Sylva.

"I can see through your game now. I suppose you thought that Frederic Drewe was too good a catch to escape you. You determined to break up things between him and me. But you had to have some kind of an excuse to enter our house. So you had a cheap copy of my necklace made, and—"

Sylva raised one hand, wearily. "Please stop. I don't want to break up anything between you and Frederic. Why should I? I am going to be married. Do you hear me?"

She was speaking to Frederic, as well as Diane, "I am going to marry Julian Lamond." She could not help adding bitterly, "Didn't you read *that* in the papers, too?"

Old Mrs. Frawley had been quiet, apparently thinking to herself, and oblivious of what was going on around her. She said suddenly:

"Now I remember. I had a copy of the emerald necklace made twenty-five years ago. It was a precaution, at the time, against jewel thieves. I wondered what had happened to the imitation. I suppose Alex took it with him. Of course, he knew that it was worthless. The original, except when it is worn on important occasions, is always kept in my vault at the bank."

The old lady's quiet words affected Sylva more dramatically than all of Diane's anger. They served to snap her last bit of composure. Her endurance had been tried to its limit.

She cried, "Yes, he knew that it was worthless! As worthless as the love he pretended to give my mother! As worthless as the false promises which lured her away from her home and friends. As worthless as himself!"

Her violent young voice cut through the taut silence. "You are society, all of you. You have condemned my mother, and you have condemned me.

Now it is my turn! You blamed my mother fifteen years ago, but you forgot to blame the man who turned her head with his lies.

"You blamed me for arriving in New York with 'my lover.' Julian Lamond is not my lover. He is the man who found employment for my mother when Alex Frawley left her destitute. He is the man who has employed me since my mother's death. The reputation of Sylva Tremaine is a clever publicity stunt. I am just a clothes model for the famous House of Lamond!"

SHE paused for breath, her breast rising and falling tumultuously.

"But I got sick of being a mere fashion plate. I wanted to be real—to experience the kind of life I'd always been afraid of. So I came to America. I came to bring Diane something I thought was valuable, and to be her friend, if she'd have me. But I was wrong. I shouldn't have come. There is no place for me here. I'm going back where I belong."

She picked up the false emeralds and twined them about her slim hand.

"Look at them, all of you. Do you wonder that I am bitter? Worthless bits of glass—but they are the price of a woman's love and life! Do you wonder that I want nothing to do with love?"

Tears burned bright in her blue eyes. In that instant she saw only Frederic. Frederic's face changed with an understanding which had come too late.

She said, "There's your 'mystery', Frederic. The mystery I wouldn't reveal. I told you that it wasn't very pretty."

Frederic's eyes would not let hers go. "Sylva, I've got to talk to you."

Diane gave a little cry, and grasped heavily at his arm.

"Frederic, I can't bear any more of this. These awful lies about my father! I—can't bear it. I feel—ill."

She closed her eyes and fainted away in Frederic's arms. Sylva smiled wanly. This might be a trick on Diane's part, but she had done it perfectly.

Sylva gave one last look at Frederic. Her voice had softened and held a touch of wistfulness.

"Take care of Diane, Frederic. She needs you. This is where *you* belong. I am going back to Paris to marry the little dressmaker."

She almost fled from the house. Frederic, with Diane limp in his arms, could not have stopped her even if he had wanted to. No one else tried.

In her hotel suite she telephoned to Julian. "I have done what I came here to do. When do we sail?"

"There's a boat at noon tomorrow, if you can be ready."

Sylva gave a queer little laugh. "I'm ready now."

The evening of the following day found her standing alone by the rail of a liner speeding back across the ocean. She had remained in the privacy of her cabin until now. She had not been among those who stood on deck to watch the skyline of New York recede into the distance. There was no land in sight now. Nothing but the darkness of sky and ocean.

Sylva was alone with her thoughts. Julian was below in his own cabin drawing sketches of wedding gowns. He had made numerous sketches during the afternoon, only to destroy them irritably. His masterpiece was not yet created.

Something green glittered in Sylva's hand. The false necklace which had brought her on such a disastrous quest. The necklace symbolized more now than her mother's tragedy. The aches

of her own heart. The poignant memories of Frederic which she must banish from her life forever. The imitation emeralds looked like mocking green eyes. Sylva could not bear to hold them any longer.

On an impulse she leaned far over the rail, her hand raised to cast the necklace into the darkness of the ocean. A muffled little cry escaped her as she was grasped suddenly from behind, and dragged forcibly away from the rail.

A voice said, "Must I save you from drowning a second time?"

She cried, "Frederic!"

Her ears told her that it was Frederic's voice. Her eyes as she half-turned in his arms told her that this was Frederic. Her senses swam from the nearness of him. But her brain refused to work, or to wonder why he should be there.

Her voice sounded dull and unnatural. "I—I wasn't going to jump overboard. I merely wanted to throw away—*this!*"

Frederic took the necklace from her and flung it far out into the water. "There! Do you feel better now?"

His face was stern, yet kind. His eyes betrayed the depths of a man's emotion. It was only then that Sylva's numbed brain began to function.

"What are you doing here?" she asked.

FREDERIC'S laugh took some of the sternness from his face. "Following you, of course. And a devil's time I've had finding you. When you disappeared into the night I hadn't the faintest idea as to where you might have gone. Early this morning I started canvassing the hotels. If you think that isn't a job in the city of New York, try it some time."

Sylva looked at him wonderingly. She had insisted that Julian must find a quiet hotel where the news reporters could not find her. And Frederic had gone to all of this trouble to find her. Why? her heart began to pound.

Frederic said, "When I finally located the place where you had been registered, you had just checked out. They told me you were sailing on this boat. I barely made it—they were starting to take down the gangplanks when I arrived. Well, Sylva, here I am!"

She murmured, "And what about Diane?"

"Diane!" said Frederic. "I don't think we need to worry about her. She was never really in love with me, you know. Ours was one of those affairs which grow upon us from childhood. Our parents wished it, and we fell in with their wishes because—well, because neither of us had found anyone we liked better. It took my chance meeting with you, Sylva, to show me that you can't call that kind of a relationship—love."

He went on, "I spoke to Diane after she recovered from her—er—indisposition. She was furious at first, but finally she had to admit that she would not care to become engaged to a man who would always love someone else."

He smiled down into her face. "No, I don't think we need to worry about Diane. She will always find fresh fields to conquer. She isn't the type that knows unhappiness."

Sylva realized that this was true. Diane Frawley, like her father, would never be really unhappy. She was too self-centered. Diane was the type which takes all, but does not give.

A glowing thrill crept through Sylva's body as she heard Frederic say fervently:

"I love you, Sylva. You are the

whole world to me. Can you ever forgive me for doubting you?"

She gave him her smile then, and a happy radiance transformed her face.

"There's nothing to forgive, Frederic. I deliberately allowed you to misunderstand me because—well, because of Diane. As soon as you mentioned the name of Diane Frawley, I *knew* that I could not take you away from her. I could not bear to repeat history—to add to the old scandal in that way.

"I had to meet Diane to realize that—that—" her voice faltered, "that she was not worth the sacrifice. But I thought it was too late for us then."

Frederic's arms tightened about her. "I see. I didn't think girls were ever as brave, as gallant, as you are, Sylva! I am going to ask you to prove your bravery just once more, my dear. You said you were going back into the exile where you belong. You're not! You are coming back to New York as my wife, to take the place where you *really* belong. You are going to make the people who condemned your mother know and love you, and understand your mother through you. You are going to kill the past."

Sylva felt exalted. His words throbbed in her ears. As his wife, and with his love, she knew that she could face anyone, accomplish anything. She found her true destiny, at last.

She cast just one regretful thought in the direction of Julian—Julian in his cabin making sketches of a wedding dress which would never be worn.

But Julian's first love was, after all, his business. He had created the glamorous Sylva Tremaine out of a frightened, inexperienced girl, to serve his own purpose, in much the same manner that he might create a gown out of raw material. He could do the same thing again, with someone else, if he chose. Someone who would perhaps like the gay life more than Sylva had liked it. The House of Lamond would go on.

A little stirring movement in Frederic's arms, and Sylva surrendered herself to him for all time. His lips claimed hers in a long, burning kiss. The world was theirs. The solitary little world of dark sky and ocean. There was no longer anything of which she had to be afraid.

Wherever they might go, it would always be like this. Nothing could harm them now.

"Lanny's hurt, Don, and I've been trying to carry her. I guess it was a foolish idea"

Cupid Has a Word for It

By VINA LAWRENCE

"WITHOUT this pug nose, I'd look a little better," Patsy thought wistfully. "Or if I had blond hair, instead of mouse colored. My eyes are sort of nice, but no one ever looks at me long enough to notice that!"

She was sitting before the mirror, rubbing lipstick onto her small drooping mouth. Lipstick which the adver-

tisement had said would "make any girl alluring, irresistible, seductive." Patsy stared at herself since her lips had become scarlet and made a little face.

"All the allure *I've* got could be put under my finger nail!" she said aloud.

She stood up and stamped her foot impatiently as she saw her full-length self in the long mirror.

She had on an expensive red knit sweater suit, a suit that would have made little black-eyed Janie Bennett look like something for dessert. It would have made Ina Ferguson, with her blond curls and her cuddly little figure, look like a million dollars. But on Patsy, who was a little too tall and a little too thin, it just looked like a red knit suit.

"I hate myself!" Patsy said passionately. "I wish I could die!"

Tears stinging at her eyes, she walked over to the window and looked out on the gay winter scene. Down below the window of the smart hotel was smart Lake Placid, gleaming pink and silver in the sunset, edged like a picture postcard with tall black-green pines and snow-covered peaks of the Adirondacks.

Skating on its surface, were brightly garbed girls and boys. Girls who were successful debs, boys who liked successful debs.

"Nobody, nobody at all, can bear an unsuccessful deb!" Patsy said to herself, and her fingernails dug into the palms of her hands. "The girls pity me but they don't want to be seen with me for fear they'll be stuck with me. Even my own mother is disgusted because I'm the first Ashley girl who ever failed as a débutante! As if I haven't tried! And tried!"

The door opened and her Aunt Bett came in, Aunt Bett who was one of the poor relations and glad enough to get a free trip to Lake Placid even if it meant chaperoning a homely niece.

"How would you like to have a nice cup of tea, darling?" she asked brightly. "I saw some perfectly charming young men in the tearoom as we came up. Of course they were drinking cocktails but we could probably get a nice nip of tea."

Patsy hoped that Aunt Bett would choke on the tea but she nodded patiently. This was the last week in January and ever since Patsy's début last Thanksgiving, all of her relatives, rich and poor, young and old, had been searching feverishly for a "charming young man" for her. And every charming young man who met Patsy was as polite as possible and escaped as soon as he could.

Not one of them had asked to take her anywhere! She was, without doubt, what is known as a complete wash-out. She was a flop. She had become, at eighteen, "poor little Patsy Ashley."

Hostesses pleaded with not-too-gallant young men to "dance just once with Patsy. She looks so pitiful standing over there!" The more generous of the successful debbies tried in vain to give her their superfluous boy friends. ("What? Didn't Gilly phone you? I told him positively to give you a ring!")

Her mother went about figuratively wringing her hands and whispering to everyone, "What *can* I do about poor little Patsy? My dear, the child is simply miserable!"

The latest thing that had been done for Patsy was to send her to Lake Placid with Aunt Bett. So here she was.

"All right," Patsy said. "Let's have tea and get it over with."

That's the way I'm beginning to feel

about life, she thought as she and Aunt Bett went down the wide stairway into the luxurious cocktail lounge with its gay music and gay crowd. Life has become just something to get over with!

Day and night, tea and dinner parties—all of them were just things to be gotten through.

"OH, it's so crowded here, dear," Aunt Bett said. "There's a place for you. Just sit down here," and she pushed Patsy into a chair at a tiny table opposite a young man.

"Oh, Heavens!" Aunt Bett cried. "I left my hankie upstairs. Excuse me, dear, while I go for it!"

She rushed away, leaving Patsy sitting alone with that young man. Patsy felt the blood rushing to her face and she pressed her lips together grimly. She knew, of course, that Aunt Bett had left her alone with him on purpose.

She lifted unhappy blue eyes to the young man's face; then she stared. She had seen a number of charming young men this season, but she had seen no one so thrilling as this. He looked exactly as she had always dreamed the "perfect lover" must look. Very brown and virile, with black hair waving back from a deep V on his forehead, with black eyes and a cleft in his chin.

And, of course, he was absorbed in his drink and completely oblivious of Patsy.

It was ridiculous to hope, of course, but she did. She began to imagine to herself that maybe *this* time would be different. Maybe this young man didn't care for beautiful girls. Maybe he just liked girls with lots of character, good honest girls with mousey hair and pug noses. Maybe he would ask her to dance to that heavenly music.

"Cupid has a word for it—" the music wailed in swing time.

Patsy's heart began to beat harder.

"Oh, please, God, make him look at me and like me!" she prayed frantically.

She began desperately to remember all the things her mother and her friends had advised her to do in order to "make yourself attractive." *Be gay and at ease. Find out what they like to talk about, and listen.*

It was plain that she was going to have to begin this, because the young man was staring into his cocktail glass and hadn't even looked at her. She took a deep breath and plunged in, her cheeks flushed, her blue eyes nearly black with excitement and fear. Fear of failing again.

"I hope you didn't mind my sitting here," she said, trying to look gay and at ease. "I mean, really, it's the only place left. There's a terrible crowd, isn't there?"

The young man didn't even look up.

She swallowed. "I said, there is a terrible crowd, isn't there?" she said loudly.

He did look up then, a little startled. His black eyes were even more thrilling than she had realized.

"Oh!" he said. "Oh—uh-huh—sure."

There was silence for a few minutes, while Patsy suffered tortures. But she made one more attempt. She tried to think of something that he might be interested in.

"I—guess you ski, don't you?" she asked. She had to repeat this a second time, and still he didn't answer.

Then, suddenly, her nerves cracked. The weeks and months of trying so desperately to get a man had been too much. Suddenly, without warning, she burst into tears.

She stood up and would have rushed from the room but the young man had come to life. He caught her arm and made her sit down.

"Hey, wait a minute!" he cried. "What's this? Were you talking to me? Gee, I'm sorry! I was thinking about something."

"Let me go," Patsy said through the tears. "It doesn't matter. I'm used to it anyway."

"Used to what, for Heaven's sake?"

"Used to—being ignored!" she cried violently. "I've been ignored by all the charming young men in New York this winter! I suppose I can stand it if *you* ignore me!"

"Easy, now!" he said. "Let me get you a drink. Here, waiter, two sherries! Now, look at me. Dry those tears. My name is Don Walters, and I had no intention of ignoring such a lovely young girl. You must forgive me."

She had dried her tears, but now she was stiff and ashamed.

"Please don't be sarcastic!" she said.

"Look here, can't we dance while we are waiting for our drinks?"

Even her humiliation dimmed before the prospect of dancing with him. She looked up, her blue eyes starry.

"Do you—want to, really?" she asked.

He grinned at her and she saw that his teeth were amazingly white in his brown face.

"I'm dying to!" he said.

SHE stood up then and he led her out to the dance floor where the gay crowd was dancing, and he took her into his arms. And they danced! Or did they?

Patsy knew about dancing. Dancing was a trying affair that consisted of listening to the music so as not to miss a beat, following carefully so that you wouldn't stumble, smiling stiffly up into your partner's face so that he would not be too sorry that he asked you to dance, and trying desperately to think of something clever to talk about. That was dancing.

This was floating away very lightly, whirling about very gayly, in two strong arms that seemed to enjoy holding her. This was walking lightly on pink clouds.

"So you've been ignored by all the charming young men in New York?" Don asked, grinning. "You're a debby, I'll bet."

For the first time in her life, Patsy could laugh at herself.

"Some call me a complete wash-out," she confided. "Others simply call me poor Patsy."

"I'll call you Pat," he said. "And I'll tell you why I didn't hear you when you spoke to me a while ago. I was deep in my own particular brand of secret sorrow. You see, I've just been ditched. It gives one a very peculiar feeling. I should say the feeling was on a par with being a complete wash-out."

They laughed together merrily and by the time they were back at their table he was telling her all about it.

"Her name is Lannie Davies, and she is red-headed and has great brown eyes and a little baby face. I am, at least I *was,* mad about her. I came up here to ski and to forget. She is going to Florida to marry a millionaire."

"Oh, I'm sorry!" Patsy said.

But she knew in her heart that she wasn't sorry. She was terribly, terribly glad!

"Now, let's talk about you again. Tell me all about *your* secret sorrow." He was grinning so merrily that it all seemed like a big joke.

But she told him, anyhow.

"You see," she finished, "there is nothing really that can be done about it. I've been to all the best beauty parlors and they've given me what they call a youthful permanent. My skin is all right and I speak good English. But no one can change the fact that I have a pug nose and am too tall."

"I like tall girls," he said.

She blushed at this. "But most men aren't much taller than I, and they hate to dance with me."

He was looking at her intently. "You're right," he said. "The beauty parlors and dress shops have done all that can be done for you—physically. You aren't a raving beauty, so you'll have to face that fact. What you have to do is develop something to take the place of beauty."

"You mean—study science or something?"

"Heaven forbid!" he laughed. "Any man hates a brainy girl. What I mean is sports! Can you swim or ski or play tennis really well?"

"No," she admitted. "Not very well. I didn't know that was important."

He leaned across the table earnestly.

"Listen, my dear, any man would rather have a girl who can swim a couple of miles with him or give him a good game of tennis than to have a beautiful blond baby lisping on his shoulder. Stop trying to beat the ballroom dolls at their own game and learn to play! Men love playmates! Now if you could ski, I mean really well, so that you stood out, you'd have half the men in Lake Placid hanging around you in a week."

She stared at him, her breath coming quickly.

"Oh, I'll learn!" she cried.

"I'll teach you," he offered. "You see, it just happens that skiing is my forte. That's why I came up here. How about in the morning, say nine o'clock?"

He was making a date with her! He really was! She couldn't believe her ears.

WHEN Patsy left him to go and dress for dinner, her feet fairly danced up the stairs. Nine o'clock in the morning. Were there any words in the world so lovely? It was now six forty-five. That made fourteen hours and fifteen minutes until—until—

Aunt Bett was almost as delighted as Patsy herself.

"Don Walters, the ski champion!" she cried. "I think skiing *would* be his forte! He was in the Olympics last year! And he comes from a wonderful family! *The* Walters!"

Patsy dressed for dinner as if for a Personal Appearance. She changed her dress four times, trying to find one that made her look sophisticated and pretty. Finally she selected a violet velvet, very soft with a lace collar about her thin, girlish neck.

"You look sweet," Aunt Bett said. "And you look happy. That makes you a lot prettier."

Maybe I'll see him at dinner, maybe I'll see him at dinner! Patsy's foolish young heart cried over and over. But she didn't even dream of the wonderful thing that happened.

She was having dinner with Aunt Bett and looking about the big dining room where the tables were near the dance floor. And there suddenly was Don, standing over her and bowing.

"I wonder if I might dance with you again?" he asked.

In a flurry of excitement Patsy introduced her aunt, and then went into his arms.

"I have a couple of friends who want

to meet you," he said. "Nice lads. Maybe you'll give them a dance."

He spoke casually. She might have been a popular girl instead of a poor little washout who was grateful for a crumb of attention.

"Oh—" she murmured. She was afraid to meet the other boys. She was afraid they wouldn't like her.

As the music stopped after the first dance, he turned about and introduced her to the two other boys. Gay, collegiate-looking boys who bowed and complimented her until she found herself flushing and laughing before the flattery.

Then she was dancing again with the boy named Joe. Then dancing with the

He caught her arm. "Hey, wait a minute! Don't go away, mad!"

boy named Tony. And again with Don!

She couldn't believe this was happening. She just couldn't believe it. This was the sort of thing one dreamed about in the middle of a sleepless night. This wasn't real.

And yet the next morning was real enough. Lemon yellow sunshine sparkling away on the millions of diamonds that filled the hard-packed snow of the mountains. Pines lifted clear green limbs to a washed blue sky. Gay red and yellow and orange costumes on skaters and skiers. Heavenly, heavenly day!

Nine o'clock, magic hour, at last. It found Patsy in a black and orange skiing suit, a toboggan pulled over her curls, her cheeks bright red from cold and excitement. She looked nearly pretty.

Don grinned at her as he fastened her little boots into the skiis. Don in a white and blue costume, his black eyes flashing in the light.

"You'll have to meet me after this," he said. "You see, I practice for hours every morning over on the south slope. If you'll meet me there every morning at nine, we'll have regular lessons."

Would she? *Would* she? After that first invigorating morning she was crazy about skiing.

Every morning for the next two weeks she met Don there and they had a skiing lesson. During those two weeks of happiness and exercise Patsy gained six pounds, and looked much more graceful and a thousand times happier than ever before.

Skiing wasn't all she did in those two weeks. Joe and Tony gave her a rush, and Don himself often took her to the movies. Either Joe or Tony took her for cocktails or driving every afternoon, and during the evening all three boys danced with her.

It was a most heavenly two weeks.

The climax of it was the day, the beautiful white and gold day, when Don kissed her. They had been skiing down a very steep run that day and she had fallen. He caught her in his arms and carried her to level ground, his dark face laughing down into hers.

Then—he kissed her. She didn't know just how it happened, but his sweet young mouth closed over hers, and the warmth and vitality of his blood seemed to course through her veins, the gayety and laughter of him seemed to become part of her.

It was sweetness and madness and beauty, that kiss. It was the answer to all her old dreams and all her young desire. It was everything on earth that mattered.

When he let her go she was limp in his arms, her eyes closed, her flushed cheek resting on his shoulder.

"Darling," he said softly. "Little—Patsy."

Then he let her go, and spoke a little gruffly.

"I shouldn't do that unless I love you very much, should I, Patsy?" he said. "You aren't the sort of girl for casual kissing."

And so they were silent all the way to the hotel, silent and a little embarrassed, but she held that kiss to her heart. She had that, anyway. That much she would always have.

THAT evening she was very glad that she had that much to remember him by because that evening Lanny Davies arrived in Lake Placid. Lanny, the beautiful redhead who had ditched Don.

He told Patsy about it at cocktail time. He told it casually enough but she saw that he was pale and that his eyes were strangely excited.

"Lanny Davies is in town," he said. "You know, the girl I told you about?"

There was an awkward silence while they looked into each other's eyes. The orchestra crashed out, *"Cupid has a word for it!"*

"Oh!" Patsy said then, and she felt a little stab of pain at her heart. "I thought she was going to marry a millionaire!"

"It seems she changed her mind," Don said; then he was silent for a moment. "We'll continue with our skiing lessons, anyhow, infant. Tomorrow at nine!"

He left her with that and presently Joe came over and asked her to dance.

During that third week, she saw Don every morning at nine for a skiing lesson, but he didn't kiss her again. He was usually silent and sometimes he looked at her as if trying to decide something.

She knew that he was spending every evening with Lanny. Joe and Tony were keeping Patsy entertained, although she didn't care for either of them. No one existed, no one had existed since that first day except—Don.

She kept hoping that Lanny would return to the millionaire and that Don would kiss her again—and mean it.

Then it happened. She was sitting in a booth in the cocktail room one afternoon early. There were two girls talking in the next booth and when Patsy heard Lanny Davies' name, she listened.

"Lanny is so jealous of that little Patsy Ashley that it's funny!" one of the girls said. "Don's been giving her skiing lessons every morning and Lanny is furious about it. She wants to own Don."

"If she had good sense she'd know that he just feels sorry for the little Ashley girl. Why, you know, he has Joe and Tony beauing her around because she was all alone."

"I know. Poor Joe told me about it. It seems Joe and Tony are here as protégés of Don's. Don is teaching them to ski, and they are obligated to him, so when he told them to keep little Patsy entertained they had to do it. Joe says they flip pennies to see which one will have to take her out. You know, they say she was a complete wash-out in New York this winter."

"Lanny says that she and Don are going to be married in June."

Patsy didn't wait to hear any more. She stood up and slipped out, taking with her what was left of her crushed pride and broken heart.

Lanny and Don were getting married. Joe and Tony talked and laughed about her. Don had been teaching her to ski because he pitied her. That was all.

She rushed to her room like a wounded wild thing. Two spots of crimson stood out in her cheeks. She stood there for a moment after she had closed the door, leaning against it, her breath coming in gasps. She longed to hide her head somewhere, anywhere. She could never face anyone here again.

What a fool she had been! She had really thought that she was popular at last! She had thought that she was getting a big rush and that even Don Walters was falling in love with her.

She hadn't had enough sense to realize that he only pitied her, and that Joe and Tony were pitching pennies to see which one of them would have to take her out. What a blind, silly little fool she had been!

She ran across the room and flung herself on the bed, crying as she had never cried before, not even last winter when she had been a failure. Then she hadn't tasted triumph; then she didn't

know what she was missing. But now, she couldn't bear to go back to that old life.

And yet she knew that she had never been out of it really except in her imagination. A gay boy had pitied a poor little failure for a little while.

THE phone rang and she answered it, trying to stop the tears in her throat. It was Tony.

"Want to meet me for cocktails?" he said.

For a moment Patsy didn't answer. She closed her eyes, seeing Tony's flushed blond face and Joe's tousled head as they leaned forward pitching a penny to see which would have to take her for cocktails. She drew in a deep breath and answered him.

"No!" she said, and slammed the phone down.

"Oh, I hate him!" she cried aloud. "I hate Tony and Joe, and even Don! He had no right to make a fool of me. He had no right to pity me. I hope I never see him again!"

Then she threw herself on the bed, sobbing, for the thought of never seeing Don again was heartbreaking.

She refused to go down to dinner later, pleading a headache. She awakened the next morning, conscious of a sinking feeling in the pit of her stomach, that old feeling made up of defeat and fear and dread. Then she remembered.

She wasn't going to meet Don this morning. She was never going to meet Don again.

He would be there waiting on the south slope this morning, but she wouldn't meet him. She would stay in her room all day.

She dressed and had breakfast in her room, glad that her Aunt Bett chose to go downstairs. Then restlessly she moved from window to window, looking out on a white world below.

It was snowing this morning, a fine steady fall banking up the snow from the night before. The sky was white with the falling flakes, and the shores of the lake were covered with laughing crowds throwing snowballs.

Patsy looked at her wristwatch. It was not yet nine o'clock.

"Oh, I can't bear to stay in," she said aloud. "I'm going out alone. I'll go for a long hike in the snow."

She dressed in the black and orange skiing suit, trying not to remember that Don had held her in his arms when she had on this suit. He had kissed her in this suit. That day when he had carried her, she had on this suit.

"Oh, I must stop *remembering!*" she cried.

She rushed down to the hall where the skiis were stacked, chose hers from the pile and went out into the cold snowfall. The flakes felt comforting in her face and, in spite of herself, her spirits rose a little as she buckled on the skiis.

She went the back way, away from the town, up the slope of hill, down a hill, away into the snow. She walked slowly, her mittened hands in her pockets, walked doggedly, hoping to tire herself out. She turned sharply when she heard a cry behind her. And she saw at the rise of the hill behind her —Lanny Davies.

Beautiful, redheaded Lanny in an all-white suit. She had stumbled and was just getting to her feet. Patsy's first impulse was to hurry away, but she turned back, chin up, determined not to give way to weakness.

"Hello," she said, forcing herself to smile. "Out for a hike?"

Lanny gave Patsy a cold look from her great brown eyes.

"I was following you, if you must know," she said icily. "You've been meeting Don every morning, and I decided to investigate."

"I'm not going to meet him this morning," Patsy said.

Lanny smiled then. "Really?" she said scornfully. "Well, then, I guess you don't mind if I go with you?"

"Not at all!"

The two girls walked for a while in silence. Lanny handled the skiis awkwardly and fell often. It was snowing harder now, and the wind was blowing hard. Patsy turned back toward the hotel. And then she realized suddenly that she wasn't sure where it lay. She started across a white hill, however, in the direction that seemed right.

Lanny spoke again scornfully.

"Do you usually go so far to meet him?"

"I told you I'm not meeting him this morning," Patsy said steadily. "If you're so jealous of him," she added, "why did you ditch him for a millionaire?"

"If it's any of your business," Lanny answered coldly, "I've been sorry a million times. I guess I was too sure of Don. But after he was gone I knew I wanted him. That's why I came here for him."

"Well," Patsy said, pushing against the wind that had reached blizzard proportions, "you needn't be jealous of *me!*" She laughed a little jerkily. *"I* never meant anything to him! He—he was just teaching me to ski because he was sorry for me."

She stopped and the two girls looked at each other.

"He hasn't treated me the same since I've been here," Lanny said. "I've been awfully jealous of you. That's why I wanted to know if you were meeting him. I thought I'd follow you and see if he kissed you. I guess," she laughed a little, "it was a pretty dumb idea. I'm awfully cold," she added. "How far is it back to the hotel?"

This was something Patsy was wondering, herself. They seemed to be in the exact center of a madly whirling white world. All four directions melted into one.

Even the wind seemed to be coming from all sides at once, and the snow was coming down so hard now that it stung her eyelids.

"I'm afraid we're in for a blizzard," Patsy said, whipping her arms together to keep warm. "It's colder, too, and I'm not so very sure of my directions. I thought the hotel was this way, but there's that same tree we passed awhile ago."

"I'm cold!" Lanny whimpered. "I'm tired, too. I keep falling. And my feet feel frozen—" Her voice trailed off pathetically.

"We have to keep moving. We'll freeze if we stop to rest. Come on, we have to move even if we go in a circle!"

THEY walked on in silence, pushing forward, doubled over against the wind. And suddenly Lanny fell again, a hard twisting tumble, and she sat up sobbing.

"My ankle!" she cried. "I—I've sprained it! I can't stand up! Oh, I'm so tired, I can't go on! You'll have to get someone to come for me."

"I can't leave you here!" Patsy cried "You'd freeze. Besides, I don't know if I'd be able to get home myself. We have to stay together."

She knelt beside the sobbing girl and felt of her rapidly swelling ankle. Lanny's beautiful little face was pale and blue with cold and she was sobbing like a baby.

"I guess I'll have to try to carry you," Patsy said. "I'm pretty strong. I can't leave you here. I've heard of people freezing to death within half a mile of home in weather like this. You might faint and the snow would cover you and no one could find you."

She stopped talking, using all her strength in an effort to carry Lanny. Half carrying, half dragging her, Patsy struggled on down the slope, up another slope, through woods. Where was she? She didn't know. But with an increasing sense of panic she realized that she was completely lost. She was among unfamiliar trees and paths.

She selected one path, keeping to it, hoping against hope that it would lead her to the town. On and on and on, making no effort to talk now, for Lanny had passed into a semi-coma brought on by pain and fatigue.

Finally Patsy heard a cry and answered, and a few moments later several men came running up to her. Don was among them. She gave a cry of relief.

"Lanny's hurt, Don," she said faintly. "I—I've been trying to carry her." Then the last of her strength seemed to ebb away, and she collapsed in his arms.

They carried the girls to the hotel—it was very near after all—and put Patsy on a couch before a fire in her own cheerful sitting room. Don stood smiling tenderly at her.

"You're okay now," he told her. "The doctor had to put your aunt to bed, though. She nearly had a stroke before we found you. How do you feel?"

"All right," she said. She wondered vaguely why he wasn't with Lanny. "How's Lanny?" she asked.

"She'll be all right. *You* are pretty well exhausted, though. I'm afraid it will be a week before we can be married."

She sat up, staring at him, forgetting her fatigue, her aching muscles. Her curls were tumbled like a child's on her flushed forehead and her blue eyes were starry. If she had only known it, she was beautiful in that moment!

"Married?"

"Will you?"

"You mean—us?"

He knelt beside the couch and caught her hands to his.

"I love you," he said simply. "Will you marry me, Patsy?"

"But—Lanny?"

"I wasn't sure, darling, until this morning when you and Lanny were both lost. And then I knew it was you, my darling little Patsy with her pug nose, that I loved. Can we be married soon?"

"Soon," she whispered, but as he clasped her in his arms tight and blissfully, she looked at him, doubt still in her glance. "But Lanny is beautiful, Don, and I am not. What is there about me that makes you sure that you love me?"

He smiled down at her, his dark eyes soft. "Maybe Cupid has a word for it, darling," he said. "I—just *know!*"

Coming Soon:

NEW MOON THROUGH A WINDOW

A Serial Story by Maysie Greig

"Hi, Earle Cochran!" she cried. "What are you doing here?" The movie star looked up in amazement. He hadn't expected to find a fan in the middle of the desert

Desert Girl

By ALLYN HARRIS

She fled to her beloved sands for comfort, and they whispered, "Go! You cannot hide from love"

HE was young, and he was handsome, and he was very, very angry.

A flat tire on a roadster costing many thousands of dollars is no different from a flat tire on the cheapest flivver —except that it is a bit harder to change.

It had been a long time since Earle Cochran had been forced to change a tire, and he looked at the job with distaste. As nearly as he could figure, he was in the middle of a long stretch of road that led through the desert country, joining Southern California and Mexico. There was not a sign of

habitation. The sun beat down glaringly, and a peculiar, deathlike stillness seemed to reign over the land.

He sighed, rubbed a hand over the crisp waves of his black hair, and removed the coat of his spotless white suit. Then he rolled back white silk shirt sleeves, said a few harsh words in the deeptoned, famous Cochran voice and surveyed the offending tire ominously.

Of course, he reflected, he should have stayed with the rest of the party on this location trip into Mexico. With the cavalcade of machines bearing camera men, directors, script girls, publicity men and cast.

He had looked forward to the trip, too, as a chance to be with Glenda Morgan, his leading lady. He and Glenda had so few moments together. The demands of their profession seemed determined to keep them apart, in spite of the fact that they had been engaged for six months.

But Glenda, at the last moment, had been possessed of that devil of perversity which made her so aggravating, and so fascinating, and had decided to ride with Martin Beale.

Furiously jealous and disappointed, Earle had started out by himself. And here he was!

Disgustedly he found the tools in the back of the car. The wrench slipped, bruising his thumb, and he glared at it balefully. Five years ago he hadn't minded changing tires, but five years makes a lot of difference in the life of a young man in Hollywood.

His meditations were interrupted by a faint break in the desert stillness. He squinted gray eyes in the direction of distant hoofbeats.

Sure enough! A lone horseman was loping down an old trail.

"Good!" breathed the young actor. "I'll give the fellow a dollar and let him do the dirty work."

He sank gratefully to the running-board, and lighted a cigarette while he waited for the stranger to approach.

As the figure drew nearer, Earle's gaze became once more despondent. Tough luck! The rider was only a kid. Too small and slim to be much of a help. Then his eyes widened—Lord, it was a girl!

"Hi!" she called, and the voice was clear and sweet and young. "Troubled?"

Then, coming closer: "Why, Earle Cochran! What in the world are you doing here?"

The actor surveyed the vision before him in amazement. Of course his fan following was scattered all over the United States, but how in heck did this slim nymph in worn overalls, with the loveliest face and most gorgeous yellow hair, he had ever seen, recognize him so promptly?

"Earle!" The little figure had jumped from her horse and was holding both his hands in her own small, grimy paws. "Don't you know me?"

She was half-laughing, half-crying; altogether adorable.

"I'm afraid I don't," admitted the puzzled young man.

"Why, I'm Dell!" she cried. "Adele Gordon's daughter. Oh, Earle, you haven't changed a bit."

"Why, Dell," he muttered. "Why—kid!" And folded her in a brotherly embrace.

She stood with her head against his shoulder for a minute, and then released herself to lift a pair of luminous blue eyes, radiant but damp with tears, to his.

"You mustn't hug me," she chided, tiny dimples coming and going at the corners of the lovely mouth. "I'm grown up, now."

"I'll say you are," the man agreed. "And, golly, how you've changed! I'd never have recognized you in the world. Just six years ago you were a long-legged brat with freckles and one of the nastiest dispositions I've ever come across. You were—let me see! You must have been about twelve or thirteen, and you're eighteen now! Right?"

The girl nodded. "And you were twenty," she said, "and the stubbornest ham actor I'd ever seen. And conceited! You were terrible. Mother always wondered how she was able to teach you anything."

"Where is your mother?" cried Earle. "I've got to see her. I've wanted to see her so often these last few years. Every bit of success I've had, I owe to her. I didn't know a thing about moving pictures when I got that chance to play the part of her son. She whipped me into shape and molded me into the part when everybody else said I couldn't do it.

"She seemed to know that I'd been living on coffee and doughnuts for months, and she used to make me eat lunch with her. Said she was lonesome and wanted company—when anybody in the studio would have given an eye to eat with her! Then she'd take me back to your place for dinner and coach me all evening. Oh, she was a peach!

"I've wondered if she knew how I got ahead. I've wanted to tell her. Wanted to try and pay her back. Then, when her health broke down and she left Hollywood, no one seemed to know where she went. Can we go to her now, Dell?"

The eyes of the girl were drowned in tears. She made a little rush forward and buried her face against the white-silk shirt.

"She's gone, Earle," she whispered. "Mommy's gone. We had a little shack here on the desert. She was so tired of the noise and the glare of Hollywood, she wanted peace and quiet.

"She hated to leave me. She wanted to take me back and start me in pictures, but—she died last year. I thought if I could get enough money together I'd go back some time. Some people on a ranch near by are letting me stay with them and paying me a little to help. I'm a desert girl, now, Earle, but some day I'll be a great actress like Mommy."

The man put a gentle hand on the bowed head. The soft, silky ringlets curled and clung around his fingers, and seemed to send tendrils down to curl around his heart, too.

His eyes were moist, and there was a huskiness to his voice.

"You're coming along with me, now," he said, decidedly. "I owe your mother a debt of gratitude I can never repay, but I'll feel I've accomplished something if I give you a boost the way she did me. I can get you started right away in small parts. There are plenty of people in Hollywood who remember Adele Gordon, and they'll be glad to have another Adele in their casts."

"Oh, Earle, you're sweet!" The girl lifted her tear-flushed face. "But I couldn't. I'd have to get ready. She gave a rueful little laugh. "About all I have to wear are these overalls and some dresses of Mommy's that I made over."

"You're coming now," Earle repeated firmly. "Consider yourself my godchild from now on. We'll get you some clothes the first place we come to."

A sudden, illuminating thought srtuck him: "Why, Glenda will lend you some!" He added awkwardly, "Glenda is my fiancée."

It had suddenly occurred to him that Glenda might not relish the idea of this lovely little thing being his godchild.

But surely if he did not object to Glenda's masculine friends, of which the suave Martin Beale was only one of many, she should not object to his paying a debt of gratitude.

There was a look of heartsick disappointment in the blue eyes lifted to his own, but it was quickly disguised by an ironic gleam.

"You'd better let well enough alone and leave me here," declared the sweet young voice. "It would have been mad enough in the first place, but a fiancée complicates matters terribly. Thanks just the same, Earle, but I'll make the grade by myself in a year or so."

"You'll come now, brat," said the man. "Here's a piece of paper. Write a note to your friends and put it on the horse—he'll go home by himself. Then I'll change this blasted tire, and we'll get going.

"Now don't start talking back to me! I am your venerable guardian, and you will have the kindness to respect my superior age and judgment."

Dell Gordon laughed joyously, excitedly. Very well, she would do it—she would go with Earle Cochran. Back to Hollywood and the carefree life of her childhood.

She had almost forgotten that people laughed and joked, and rode in imported roadsters, and wore dainty clothes. She had almost become a part of the somber, awe-inspiring stillness of the desert.

Fate must have sent this man, who had been the idol of her childhood, the hero of her youthful dreams.

"Never turn your back on Fate," her mother had often said. "Fate sent me to the desert; Fate is taking me before I have a chance to see you started on the road to success. There must be some reason for it. Things usually straighten themselves out."

"I'll go. Oh, I'll go!" whispered Dell. Her eyes were shining and her cheeks flushed. "I hope you won't be sorry, Earle."

"Sorry!" scoffed the bronzed young man, standing triumphantly beside the changed tire. "It will be a pleasure, my child."

THE rest of the trip was certainly a pleasure. They had so much to talk about. Memories of past days; some amusing, some tragic, but all of them engrossing to the two who sat side by side in the expensive roadster.

No longer was Earle Cochran the popular star of Reelart Pictures; no longer was Dell Gordon a waif of the desert. They were girl and boy, with five years of separation to bridge.

But when they reached location, difficulties began to arise at once.

Glenda Morgan acknowledged Earle's introduction with a glance of amused scorn at Dell's small, overalled figure; then, as her tawny eyes beheld the loveliness of the little heart-shaped face, the glance became a cloudy menace, overshadowed by a smile of acid sweetness.

"She hates me already," thought Dell, fearfully; a chill running down her form.

This was what the older Adele had had to contend with. The hate and the jealousy and the bitterness. That was why, sick in heart and body, she had fled to the desert.

"She will do everything in her power to turn Earle away from me and keep me from getting a chance," Dell told herself.

The other introductions were different. The director looked at her with interest and a kindly admiration.

"I remember your mother," he said. "You are very like her. If you are half

as good a trouper, you should find Hollywood an easy nut to crack."

Martin Beale, as tall and handsome as Earle, was frankly delighted with this new and unusual girl.

"You're lovely," he murmured, "and, I trust, not the exclusive property of your discoverer. After all, no man should have sole rights to the two most beautiful girls in the world."

Dell flushed and looked uneasily from the cloudy, vexed glance of Glenda to the furious glare of Earle.

"Earle is a sort of self-appointed guardian," she laughed shyly. "But I warned him that the job might prove too big for him."

"I only hope that everyone will understand the guardianship is purely platonic," said Glenda in a tone full of spite. "Otherwise, I am afraid that I shall have trouble explaining my fiancé's interest in another young lady."

"Everyone knows that Dell's mother was just like a mother to me, too," cried Earle hotly. "I was sure you would understand, Glenda, and be a friend to Dell."

"My dear boy," murmured the actress soothingly, laying a white, proprietary hand on his arm. "Of course I shall be a friend to your little adopted sister. We were teasing you, you silly thing."

"You're a peach, darling," said Earle gratefully, lifting the white hand to his lips.

Dell turned away, sick at heart. She was going to hate this new world, she felt. Couldn't Earle see what a cat the beautiful Glenda was?

THE company remained on location in the little Mexican town for two days, and then set out for Hollywood. This time Glenda nestled beside Earle in the big roadster, and watched Martin Beale settle Dell in his own car with enigmatic eyes.

Although she was engaged to Earle, she regarded Martin as her property, too.

Dell, meanwhile, gazed at the flying landscape with somber eyes. She was on her way to Hollywood, that Mecca of shattered hopes. Would it leave her broken and disillusioned, as it had her mother?

Even now she had suffered one bitter disappointment. Earle belonged to Glenda!

Martin Beale reached out a brown hand and caught her own as it rested in her lap.

"What's the matter, child?" he asked tenderly. "Why the sigh? Aren't you happy? You should be. It won't be long until you'll be making Glenda look to her laurels."

Dell moved her hand gently and gave him a wistful smile.

"I feel sort of alone and afraid," she admitted. "I feel that something unpleasant is going to happen."

"Oh, bosh!" laughed Martin. "Nothing unpleasant could happen to anyone as lovely and sweet as you. I wouldn't let it.

"I wish you would have more confidence in me, Dell. You're always so formal. You mustn't be, child; I won't hurt you. I'm a villain only on the screen, y'know. At home, I'm really a very nice chap. Good to my mother, fond of children—and all that sort of thing."

"I'll consider your application," Dell smiled, demurely.

It seemed that Martin was as good as his word. Earle made arrangements for Dell to live at a girl's club, and got her several small parts at the studios; but it was Martin who took her dancing

at the Coconut Grove, Martin who took her to luncheon at the Brown Derby, Martin who took her home to meet his mother, and had his sister introduce her to the very smartest of Hollywood shops.

It seemed that Earle's leisure was more and more taken up by the exacting Glenda. She bound him round with a thousand little wiles.

However, he found time to remonstrate with Dell.

"You're getting yourself talked about," he told her disapprovingly. "Martin is noted for being a professional lady-killer. You're too new in the game to start having your name connected with any man."

"Nerts, my good man!" laughed Dell. "It's much better to have my name connected with Martin than to have it linked with an engaged gent like yourself. I can't sit home and twiddle my thumbs, you know. I was buried in the desert too long to love the four walls of my room."

"I'm responsible for you," Earle insisted. "I'm not going to have you rushed off your feet by the first man you meet. You'll have dinner with me tomorrow night, and like it!"

"What about Glenda?" asked Dell, cheeks flushed.

"She'll understand," said Earle confidently.

Glenda, however, did not understand. She staged a very pretty scene, which included tears, reproaches and finally threats.

"I tell you I'm responsible for the kid," protested Earle, miserably.

"Kid!" Glenda laughed wildly. "She's old enough to know what she wants and she wants you! She's even trying to steal scenes from me at the studios. Believe me, that precious mother of hers trained her well. She knows just how to go about getting the most attention."

"Be still!" ordered Earle, his lips set in a stern white line. "Adele Gordon was a wonderful woman, and Dell is a sweet kid. I won't listen to that sort of talk."

"Oh, darling," mourned Glenda. "You don't love me any more."

"Of course I love you!"

Fondly he took the silken-clad figure in his arms. But the scene left an unpleasant taste in his mouth.

AND so Earle was distraught and uneasy as he sat at a little table across from a radiant Dell, that night.

Such scenes as this could not go on forever. He wondered if Glenda would keep them up after they were married.

Perhaps he had made a mistake in bringing Dell to Hollywood. After all, what business has a young bachelor, being guardian to such a beautiful young thing?

She *was* beautiful, he admitted to himself. There was a youthful charm about her which Glenda did not possess. As they danced, he felt an unaccustomed stirring of his blood. He wondered if she could really be attached to Martin Beale.

As for Dell, she was living in a radiant dream. Earle might belong to Glenda but he was here for this brief hour. She would make the most of it.

After dinner, the roadster carried them along the shore. The moon shone on the glistening waves as they dashed upon the smooth sands of the beach.

They talked softly, intimately.

"I have a grand part in this new picture," Dell told him. "Tomorrow I have a scene with me landing an airplane to rescue my older sister. Glenda is the sister—that's the lead, of course.

"But I love my part! Flying is so thrilling. Of course the pilot is really concealed in the back seat, but it will look just as if I'm landing the plane. It makes me feel so important!"

Earle laughed. "Baby!" he teased.

"Oh, here's the Beach Café," cried Dell. "I've never been here. Let's go in and have one more dance before we go home. I like dancing with you, Earle."

"I like dancing with you, too," he told her as they found a table in the crowded little roadhouse.

The lights were dim, and as they danced slowly and in perfect rhythm to the haunting strains, Earle felt a poignant tenderness for the little creature in his arms. She was so sweet. So dangerously sweet. He rested his head lightly on the silky yellow ringlets.

She was so sweet. So dangerously sweet! Earle's mouth found hers and clung. Neither one noticed the couple dancing beside them

She lifted her little face questioningly. Her eyes were soft and wistful, and the crimson lips trembled ever so slightly.

Earle lowered his head, and his mouth sought the sweetness of those lips and clung. It all seemed very natural, very beautiful.

Neither noticed the couple dancing beside them.

Glenda's eyes were fiery with hate, as she dragged her partner toward the door.

"Let's get out of here, before I tear that little upstart to pieces!" Her voice shook with fury. "Do they think I'm an utter fool? Do they think I'll sit by and let them make me the laughingstock of Hollywood? I'll get rid of her if it's the last thing I do!"

"Why do you bother, Glenda?" asked Martin, wearily. "You told me tonight that you did not love Earle. You said it had always been me. You can't have us both, you know."

"Do you think I'm going to let him play me for a sap?" she cried. "And don't think I don't know you've fallen for that baby-face, too! I'm not as dumb as I seem. You'll take me off Earle's hands so that she can be happy. Nice of you, Sir Knight! A noble sacrifice. Well, I don't need your sacrifices!"

"You're hysterical," Martin said calmly, as they got into his car. "Any man would be glad to have the love of Glenda Morgan. Earle and I were both crazy about you."

"Until she came." Glenda laughed scornfully. "Then, manlike, you both went crazy over a new face. Never mind. Forget it. If you're satisfied, I am."

She lapsed into a brooding silence, beautiful chin buried thoughtfully in the furs at her neck.

When Earle left Dell at the door of her club he cupped her dimpled chin in the palm of his hand and turned her face up to his own.

"You meant it, my sweet? You really love me?"

"Always." The girl nodded shyly. "Ever since I was a kid. I didn't want you to know. I thought you loved Glenda."

"I don't think I ever loved her," the man said thoughtfully. "Her beauty fascinated me, and we were thrown together in our work. But Glenda is incapable of feeling real love; she is too self-centered. I think she will release me. I couldn't go on with the engagement now. The touch of your lips took me into heaven—a heaven that I never want to leave."

"Oh, darling!" sighed Dell in ecstasy, before the young actor once again closed her lips with his own.

THE next morning found Dell arrayed in her smart little aviation suit, ready for her big scene.

Glenda was already at the field. An accomplished pilot herself, she stood talking to the pilot of Dell's plane. There was nothing in her easy manner to show that, just a few moments before, she had cleverly managed to obstruct the plane's fuel feed so that the gas would flow easily until they were in the air—and then send them crashing to the earth.

She smiled lazily at the trim figure of Dell, as she came across the field.

"How brave of you, dear," she purred like the tiger cat she was, "to do the scene yourself. You could have had a double, you know. Of course, it's different with me. I've flown my own plane for a couple of years, now, and I'm not at all afraid of the air. I would have loved to do the part."

"I'm not afraid of the air, either," protested Dell. "I think it's a lot of fun. I wish I could have done it all alone."

Glenda glanced at the pilot. Too bad he had to be sacrificed, too. But nothing was too great a price to get this girl out of her way.

She came close to Dell. "By the way," she said, her voice lowered and seemingly kind. "Earle called me this morning and asked me to release him. I told him that I would gladly do so, since I had discovered it was Martin I love after all. I thought I'd let you know that there were no hard feelings. I wish you and Earle every happiness."

Dell lifted her grateful, astounded eyes. "Why, that's lovely of you, Glenda," she said joyously. "I hope you'll be happy, too."

"I will be," declared Glenda, imperturbably.

Her eyes were enigmatic as she watched Dell climb into the cockpit in front of the hidden pilot.

"Now, Miss Gordon," called the director. "Your pilot has his instructions. You're to go up and fly around for about ten minutes while we set up the cameras here. We want to get the complete landing. Have your head out, and climb out as soon as the plane stops, so that the audience can see that you were actually in the plane they watched land. Just as we rehearsed it yesterday. All right. Tell that guy 'contact.'"

They were off! Gliding across the field and lifting gently into the air. Up and up, just a little above the tallest tree. Soon they would be in the clouds.

There was a cough and then a sputter in the booming voice of the engine. The worried face of the pilot appeared above the cockpit. He motioned to Dell, said something. But she could not understand him.

The plane turned sharply, whipstalled and changed its course abruptly. They were quite near the field. Dell could distinguish all the figures of the directors, camera men and cast. They were nosing down, almost at right angles to the ground.

She clutched the side. There was a rush of air, a horrible sinking and a crash. Then darkness.

THE hospital room was white and spotless, but gay with a multitude of flowers. The nurse hovered about solicitously.

"You've been here a week," she told Dell. "Shock and bruises. Neither you nor the pilot was badly hurt, but Miss Morgan was killed by the falling plane. Wasn't it awful? Just before she died, she confessed that she had tampered with the engine and caused the crash."

Dell felt sick and tired. She closed her eyes wearily and turned her face to the wall. She couldn't understand a hate like that. An emotion that would destroy.

So this was Hollywood! This was the price you paid for success and happiness and love. No wonder her mother had fled from it.

"Mr. Beale and Mr. Cochran call every day, and telephone goodness knows how often, and send all these lovely flowers," the talkative nurse volunteered.

"Tell them I can't possibly see anyone," requested Dell. "And find me some clothes, please. I'm going home."

NIGHT lay like a smothering robe of velvet over the quietness of the desert.

Dell sat in the doorway of the little shack she had shared with her mother —oh, centuries ago! Her eyes were closed, and her long, gold-tipped lashes

rested quiveringly on her pale cheeks.

She had come back here, hoping to find peace. The maelstrom of emotions into which she had been tossed had proved too much for her. Hate, ambition, jealousy—these things were not for her. What did success mean if you had to take these things along with it?

But she found that she could not escape so easily. Wherever she turned, there were memories of Earle.

And so at last she had decided she would go back and acknowledge herself beaten. She would accept life the way it came to her, and if it brought her turmoil and ugliness, it would also bring her the compensating joy of love.

An approaching automobile broke the stillness of the night. Automobiles in that section were rare. She breathed a silent little prayer into the dusk, and opened her eyes to find her prayer answered.

"What a time I had getting here," declared her sweetheart. "The desert almost swallowed me up. But if my girl was here I was going to be here, too."

She pulled him down beside her in the doorway.

"I was a coward," she said. "I ran away from you—from love."

"Silly darling," said Earle, gathering her into his arms. "Don't you know that you can run away from everything but love? Even the desert can't hide you from that."

She nodded against his shoulder and sighed. A small sigh filled with a new contentment. She felt his lips searching for her own and knew, suddenly and certainly, that there would be no more confusion, no more ugliness in her life. Love would wrap her around and protect her forever.

"I love you," murmured the man against the crimson sweetness of her young mouth. "Promise me you'll never run away again."

"Never again," she whispered obediently.

"Hereafter, if things get too difficult and Hollywood weighs too heavily, we'll run away," Earle promised. "But we'll always run away together."

"Together," repeated Dell with satisfaction.

And she hoped her mother knew that her dearest wish had come true.

Carmen

WHAT will I do with my broken dreams?
I shall heap them with soft caresses,
The light of the moon, the dust of the stars,
And then scatter them in my tresses.

What will I do with my broken heart?
Of my grief I shall make a cover
To hide its wounds, while I laugh and sing
In the arms of another lover.

—Edgar Daniel Kramer

What kind of luck could Lucy Crane expect? Against the advice of relatives and friends, she had married

The Town's Bad Boy

By Mrs. HARRY PUGH SMITH

CHAPTER IX

CONSTABLE JIM PETERS did not find anything in Stephen Burke's house to justify the search warrant, but Lucy did not wait to see. She ran every step of the way to the police station.

She had not even waited to get a hat. Her hair was blown by the wind; her eyes were wild with anxiety when she came into the small, red-brick building, and then they would not let her see Stephen.

"The sheriff has come over from the county seat to take charge of the investigation," they told her. "He is questioning the prisoner now. No one is permitted to go in."

"But I'm his wife!" she cried.

Julia laid her hand on his. "You will find out now," she murmured insinuatingly, "which of us really loves you. Your wife has not even come near you in your trouble!"

The deputy merely shrugged his shoulders.

"You can sit down over there and wait if you like," he said, indicating a straight wooden bench by the door "But I don't know when you can speak to your husband. It would be better if you went home and came back this afternoon."

But Lucy could not bear the thought of returning to their rooms without Stephen. Even if she could not see him, she wanted to stay under the same roof with him, as near as possible.

All morning she sat there on that hard bench, staring blindly straight before her, straining her ears for the sound of Stephen's voice in the examining room down the long narrow hall outside, but never hearing it.

Usually the dullest place in town, the police station was a bustle of excitement that day. People were going in and out constantly. They were all required to state their business to the deputy in charge. That was how, little by little, Lucy learned the story of Stephen's arrest.

Somebody had broken into the mill last night, shortly before the watchman made his midnight rounds. Saturday was pay day at the mill, and it was the custom to bring in the money for the pay roll the afternoon before. The thief had taken five thousand dollars in cash.

The police had a strong case against Stephen Burke. Just before midnight, the watchman saw Stephen's car drive up and park across the street. He ate his lunch and then made another round. When he came to the mill office, he found the door hanging open and on entering discovered that the safe had been forced. The money for the pay roll was gone.

The watchman ran out into the street to give the alarm, but somebody was lying in wait for him. He was knocked out by a severe blow on the head. When he came to, it was almost morning.

He immediately called Constable Jim Peters, who went to the room where Stephen Burke's father lived. He found Bill lying across his bed in a stupor, and in the pocket of his ragged trousers was five hundred dollars which was identified as part of the missing pay roll.

Stupid with drink, hardly conscious of what he was saying, Bill contended that the money had been given him by his son a little after midnight at the Blue Lion Tavern. Joe Winters, the proprietor, testified that Stephen came into the tavern at that time, looking for his father, and took him away. The car was found in an alley behind Bill's dingy rooming house. There was a blood-stained iron bar in the car which the police said had been used to knock out the night watchman, also the strong brown bag in which the pay roll money had been kept.

The police were on the point of going to Stephen's home to question him, when Constable Jim Peters came upon Stephen near the railroad tracks and arrested him. Peters claimed that Stephen was just preparing to hop a train at the water tank. Stephen said he was walking to town down the railroad tracks on his way home.

When ordered to give an account of his movements for the night, Stephen told a strange and rambling tale. He said that the afternoon before just as he was leaving the mill, he received a note from his father saying he was very ill at a house down the river.

Stephen said he jumped into his car and went at once. When he reached the place, he was surprised to find it apparently deserted. He claimed he started to investigate and was trying to open the front door, when somebody knocked him down and he knew nothing else for hours.

When he came to, his car was gone. He started to walk home down the railroad tracks and was arrested on the outskirts of town by Jim Peters.

Unfortunately, Stephen could not produce the note that had decoyed him away. He had torn it up as soon as he read it, he said. Nor when a deputy sheriff investigated the empty house was there any sign that anybody had been near the place in months.

"The fellow's lying like a dog," Lucy heard one of the police say. "The sheriff has had a doctor examine his head. If he was knocked out, it must have been with a feather pillow. There isn't even a lump to show for it."

THE sheriff was calling witness after witness. They passed Lucy in a steady stream, and every one made things look blacker for Stephen.

Jim Peters clung to his story that Stephen was on the point of skipping town on a train when arrested. The bank manager identified both the brown bag which had been found in Stephen's car and the money taken from Bill Burke's pocket as belonging to the pay roll. A dozen people testified that Stephen had resented the way he was underpaid and overworked at the mill.

"He was always saying he'd find a way to make them give him what he was worth," said one mill hand after another.

Lucy could hear them talking after they came out of the office where the sheriff was grilling Stephen. It seemed to her that the evidence was piling up like a tremendous black cloud, obscuring the sun, filling her heart with a terrible dismay. And still they would not let her see Stephen.

When she saw her father come into the police station, she almost cried out. He hated Stephen; there was nothing he would not do or say to injure him. From the first Joseph Crane had believed Stephen would come to a bad end.

"L u c y!" he demanded angrily. "What are you doing here?"

"I've got to see Stephen," she said.

"Isn't it enough that he's brought this terrible disgrace on us all?" he asked. "Must you hang around here, where no decent woman would be found?"

"Stephen hasn't disgraced me. He's innocent."

"Innocent!" snorted the mill superintendent. "He stole that money, and he was trying to run off and leave you to face it alone. Only for Jim Peters you'd never have seen or heard of your precious Stephen again. And still you stand by him! Go home, Lucy. Keep out of this business."

"He isn't guilty. He's my husband and I love him! I'll always love him," answered Lucy defiantly.

"Your mother and I will stand by you if you give him up," declared her father. "We'll help you out of this terrible trouble, if you'll promise never to see him again."

"I'm his wife," said Lucy. "I'll be here when he wants me."

Joseph Crane was red with anger when he was finally admitted to the sheriff's presence. Lucy could hear him roaring beyond the closed door.

"Yes," he was saying, "Stephen Burke married my daughter, but he's a scoundrel; like his drunken father! I wouldn't put anything past either of them. I'd rather have seen my daughter dead than the wife of such a man. Thank God, this has finished it! After what's happened, she's through with that rascal forever."

Stephen, who had been sitting there for hours, tortured, like an animal on the rack, lifted his haggard face.

"Did Lucy say that?" he asked in a hoarse voice.

"Yes," snapped Joseph Crane. "She wishes she'd never heard of you. She doesn't want to see you again as long as she lives."

Stephen's hands clenched on the arms of his chair until the knuckles were a shiny white.

"If Lucy feels like that," he said dully, "I don't care what happens to me."

"You were never good enough for her!" cried her father.

"No," muttered Stephen, his face ravaged by pain, "I know I wasn't. And now I guess she wishes I'd never been born."

"What did you do with the rest of the money, Burke?" demanded the sheriff.

"I've told you a thousand times," said Stephen wearily, "that I never had it. I never robbed the bank. I've been framed. Framed for something I didn't do."

"He's lying like a dog," said Joseph Crane. "The truth isn't in him. It never was. From the first he's been a trouble-maker at the mill, never doing his work properly, always demanding higher wages. I wouldn't trust him out of my sight."

The sheriff nodded gravely. "He's guilty all right," he said. "We can be thankful that Jim Peters was on the job. But for him, Burke would have escaped."

Stephen's lips twisted with bitterness.

"Peters hates me. He's lying when he says I was trying to hop a train. It's all a frame-up, I tell you, and Peters was in on it," he said fiercely.

"If that's true where did you get the money you gave your father a little after midnight?" demanded the sheriff.

Stephen shivered. "I did not give my father any money at that time. I wasn't in the Blue Lion that night. At midnight I was lying miles down the river road, unconscious."

"Do you mean your father's lying?" sneered the sheriff. "Are you insinuating that he also framed you?"

Stephen turned deathly white.

"I don't know what to think," he whispered.

Joseph Crane laughed harshly. "The old man will probably try to change his story when he sobers up," he said scornfully. "He's as big a liar as his son."

He turned toward the door and Stephen started to his feet.

"Tell Lucy it isn't true! I'm not guilty!" he cried desperately.

"Lucy isn't interested!" snapped her father.

Stephen sank back into his seat and covered his face with his hands.

LUCY ran to meet her father when he came down the hall. "Is Stephen all right?" she asked breathlessly.

"All right!" sneered Joseph Crane. "He's about two feet from the penitentiary, which is exactly where he ought to be!"

"Oh!" she gasped. "But they can't send Stephen to jail! They can't! For something he didn't do!"

"The sheriff told me himself that Stephen did do it," said Mr. Crane. "Now will you be sensible and come home with me where you belong?"

He took hold of her roughly, tried to lead her away, but Lucy jerked free.

"I'm not going anywhere until I see Stephen."

"You're making your name and my name a by-word in the town," stormed her father. "A lot he cared what became of you when he pulled this dirty trick."

"He didn't do it! He didn't!" she repeated.

"I wash my hands of you until you come to your senses," her father told her furiously.

He stalked away, but Lucy ran after him.

"Stephen needs a lawyer, someone to see that he gets justice," she pleaded. "And we haven't any money. Father, if you ever loved me, help me! Get a lawyer for Stephen."

"Spend money to keep that scoundrel from his just dues?" cried Joseph Crane. "Not one penny!"

Lucy crept back to her place on the wooden bench. She could scarcely sit

upright. She felt as if her heart would pull her in two. The deputy looked at her pityingly.

"Can I see Stephen now?" she asked, over and over.

"Not now," said the deputy each time, and when her shoulders sagged, he added kindly, "Hadn't you better go home?"

"Not till I see Stephen," said Lucy. "Not till he knows I'm standing by him."

At noon Jonathan Hills came. He sat down by Lucy and begged her to go out with him and get something to eat if she would not let him take her to her father's house.

"I'm not hungry, Jonathan," she faltered. "I couldn't eat."

"But you'll make yourself ill, going on like this."

"I won't leave until I've talked to Stephen," she said stubbornly.

"It breaks my heart to see you like this, Lucy," he said. "Stephen isn't worth your breaking your heart over."

"He's my husband and I love him. I'll not desert him when he is in trouble."

"Isn't there anything I can do?" he stammered. "I'd do anything to help you, Lucy, anything!"

"I know," she said, her lips quivering, "you're a true friend, Jonathan. But I don't know what to do. I've racked my brain. If I had the money, I'd hire a good lawyer."

She looked up pleadingly into his face. Jonathan had money in his savings account, but she did not believe he would want to spend it on Stephen and she was right.

"It would be money thrown away, Lucy," he said, turning red. "No lawyer could save Stephen, because he's guilty."

"No, no!" she protested frantically.

"Every bit of the evidence is against him."

"But he is innocent!"

"I wish he were, for your sake," he said sadly.

She drew a long breath. "Nobody except me ever was fair to Stephen—unless it's Detective Hawks."

Jonathan flushed. "Detective Hawks is an old fogy!" he cried.

"But he used to be one of Pinkerton's best detectives," Lucy reminded him.

"He's been retired for years, Lucy. He's an old man, and times have changed since he worked for Pinkerton."

"He's always liked Stephen," said Lucy. "Jonathan, will you go and get Detective Hawks for me?"

"But, Lucy—" he began.

"Maybe he can't help, maybe nobody can help," she said forlornly. "But I must do something for Stephen. I must!"

CHAPTER X

FINALLY, although he plainly did not like the errand, Jonathan went off, promising to bring the ex-detective back with him if possible. Lucy believed that Jacob Hawks would come. He had been living on a farm, raising roses for a hobby, and Stephen had worked for him several summers. He and the old detective were great friends.

Lucy felt as if she had begun to live again when Jacob Hawks came into the police station about two that afternoon.

"What's this! What's this!" he cried indignantly. "Stephen accused of robbing the mill! Ridiculous! Pure tommy-rot!"

He was a huge old man, tall and almost as broad as he was high, with a shock of snow-white hair and a beak-nosed face. Lucy clung to his big, sunburned hand.

"Stephen didn't do it!" she cried.

"Of course not," scolded Jacob Hawks. "The boy is full of life, but there's no harm in him. He'd have made an excellent man for Pinkerton's if he could have had the chance."

"Stephen has never had a fair chance at anything!"

"No," agreed the old detective. "He's had to carry a man's-sized load ever since he was ten years old."

"You won't let them send him to jail?" she pleaded.

"Not on your life!" cried Jacob Hawks. "I'll have him out of here inside of an hour."

He marched wrathfully down the hall to the office of the sheriff.

Lucy's heart felt easier. Jacob Hawks was still a force among the county officials. They would not refuse to let him see Stephen.

He was admitted at once into the room where Stephen was being questioned and remained there for almost two hours while Lucy waited on her bench, almost holding her breath.

"He'll get Stephen out," she kept telling herself. "In just a minute they'll both come walking out that door and everything will be all right."

But when Jacob Hawks finally appeared, he was alone. His face was downcast.

Lucy began to tremble.

"Stephen!" she asked brokenly. "Couldn't you do anything?"

"There, there," said Jacob Hawks soothingly. "You mustn't take on so, my child. Rome wasn't built in a day. Stephen has got himself in deeper than I thought. But we'll manage somehow, though it is going to take time."

"Time!" she faltered.

"They have a strong case against the boy," he admitted, shaking his head. "Stronger than I dreamed! It's all circumstantial evidence, but it makes a stout chain."

"I can't stand it," whispered Lucy, and broke into heartbroken weeping.

He glanced at her pityingly. "If you could swear that Stephen was at home with you last night," he said.

Lucy paled. "He wasn't home. I haven't seen him since yesterday at noon."

He sighed. "There's nothing to support the story he tells about where he spent the night."

"Surely, if he had done it," cried Lucy, "he'd have thought up a better alibi."

"The most damning thing against him is the money which Bill Burke claims his son gave him. We might believe that Stephen was framed, except that his father wouldn't do anything to injure the boy."

"No," acknowledged Lucy, "Stephen's father adores him. He wouldn't help anybody frame Stephen."

"And there is the fact that Stephen tried to skip town," added the detective with a frown. "Innocent men don't run away."

"But they have only Jim Peters' word for that!" cried Lucy. "And he hates Stephen."

"The thing that worries me most is Stephen's own attitude," confessed Hawks.

"What do you mean?" stammered Lucy.

"He sits there with his head in his hands, as if he had given up."

"Oh!" cried Lucy. "Why won't they let me see him? I must see him!

I've got to tell him I know he's innocent! If I can talk to him, he won't give up. If he knows I believe in him, he'll fight tooth and nail to clear himself. Please, Detective Hawks, make them let me see Stephen."

"I'll do my best," said the old man. "But you must be patient, Lucy. The sheriff has his hands full. This is the biggest case they've ever had in this town. It may be very late before they finish questioning Stephen."

"I don't care how late it is!" she cried. "I'll wait all night if necessary."

The detective patted her shoulder. "I'll see what I can do," he promised. "I'll leave no stone unturned for either of you. Rest assured of that."

HE WENT away, still looking grave and worried. Lucy had a sinking feeling that Jacob Hawks had lost faith in Stephen. She locked her trembling hands until she felt the nails bite into her palms.

She had not eaten since the day before. The very thought of food sickened her. Her face was as white as paper and there were black smudges under her eyes. Sometimes it seemed to her that it was all a dreadful tortured dream from which she must awaken at last to find herself safe at home with Stephen's arm about her. But the nightmare went on and on.

It was after five o'clock that afternoon when they brought Bill Burke into the police station. He stumbled along as if he could scarcely put one foot before the other. His eyes were bloodshot, his face gray and twitching with nerves.

With a broken cry Lucy ran to him.

"You're going to see Stephen!" she cried, clinging to his hand. "Tell him I'm here. Tell him I love him, and know he isn't guilty! I'll never believe he did it, never!"

"I'll tell him," quavered Bill.

She tried to go to the door with him. She even tried to slip into the room at his side, but a couple of deputies thrust her back. The door closed in her face. She had not got even a glimpse of Stephen, nor he of her.

Drearily she went back to her bench, sank down on it again.

When Bill came out, she felt sure he would bring her some message from Stephen. But time dragged on and Bill was still shut up in the office. And then, as the clock struck six, Lucy's father ran into the police station, his face like death.

"Lucy!" he cried. "You've got to come! Come at once! Your mother's dying!"

She started to her feet, her knees buckling under her.

"Mother! Dying!" she exclaimed.

Joseph Crane was like a wild man.

"It's her heart," he said. "The doctor says she won't live, and she's calling for you, Lucy. I tell you she's dying—you've got to come!"

Lucy had never seen her father so frantic. He had only one thought, to take her to her mother before it was too late. For the moment he had forgotten Lucy's marriage, forgotten everything except that his wife was dying.

"Come!" he urged. "There isn't a moment to lose!"

"Yes, father," whispered Lucy and ran with him out of the station. "Oh, mother; mother!" she kept praying. "Please don't die! Please live for all our sakes!"

Back in the sheriff's office Bill Burke, shaking with nervousness, was repeating over and over what he had said

from the time he first entered the room.

"I was drunk last night, your honor. I didn't know what I was saying if I told Constable Peters that my boy give me that money."

"If he didn't give it to you," thundered the sheriff, "where did you get it?"

Bewildered, Bill put his hand up to his forehead.

"I don't know, sir," he faltered. "I was in the Blue Lion Tavern. Joe Winters gave me some drinks and I went to sleep. The next thing I knew I was at home in bed and the constable was hammering on the door."

"BUT you told Peters your son gave you the money," insisted the sheriff.

"Jim Peters says I told him that. If I did, I don't remember it," said Bill.

"It will do neither you nor Stephen any good, my man, to try to lie out of it now," snapped the sheriff.

"It's my word against Jim Peters'," mumbled Bill. "He says I told him that. I say I didn't."

"Why should Peters lie?"

"He hates my boy."

The sheriff shrugged his shoulders.

"As between the word of an officer and the word of a drunken bum, I am forced to believe Peters," he said coldly.

"I may be a drunken bum," said Bill, "but my boy is as honest as they come."

The sheriff frowned. "We have more than Peters' word to go on," he said. "Joe Winters swears that your son came into the bar shortly after midnight and took you away with him."

"I don't know how I got home from the Blue Lion," said Bill. "I was drunk. But if Stephen says he wasn't there, he wasn't."

Stephen for the first time raised his face from his hands.

"The money was planted on dad," he said in a dull voice. "While he was stretched out at that table asleep, somebody put it in his pocket, the same somebody who took him home and later planted that iron bar and the brown money bag in my car."

The sheriff frowned. "You left the old man five hundred dollars, Burke, because you didn't want him to starve to death after you ran away from town."

"I wasn't running away," said Stephen. "Peters is lying about that, just as he has lied about everything else."

"Jim Peters is a constable and I have never heard any complaints about him in the township," said the sheriff.

"He's a snake," answered Stephen calmly, "but he's been able to fool everybody except me. That's why he has it in for me."

"Stephen wouldn't have run off from his wife!" exclaimed Bill. "They are crazy about each other."

The young man's lips twisted with pain.

"No," he said, "I wouldn't have run off from Lucy. She's all I ever had that made life worth living. But you're wrong, dad, she isn't crazy about me. Not any more. She doesn't even want to see me again."

His father stared at him blankly. "Lucy doesn't want to see you? Why, she's been right outside the door there all day, waiting for a glimpse of you."

Stephen started to his feet, his dark eyes blazing.

"Lucy's out there!" he cried.

"She told me to tell you she knows you're not guilty," went on Bill.

"Did Lucy say that!" cried Stephen, and his haggard face looked radiant.

"She asked me to tell you that she loves you and she never will believe you did this thing!"

Stephen was like a different man. His head was erect, his eyes were sparkling with spirit.

"I didn't rob that safe!" he cried, and his voice rang. "I've been framed, and I'll prove it! If Lucy still believes in me, I'll lick the whole world!"

"Lucy ain't the kind to quit her man when he is in trouble," said Bill.

Stephen drew a long breath and took his father's hand.

"Don't deceive me about Lucy, dad," he begged. "You aren't saying this just to keep up my courage?"

"Your wife is true blue, Stephen. You can bank your life on that."

Stephen's shoulders squared. "I want to see Detective Hawks again," he told the sheriff. "I'm going to fight! Please send for him at once. And in the meanwhile I want to speak to my wife."

The sheriff shrugged his shoulders.

"I have no objections to your seeing your wife for a few minutes," he said. "I've done all the questioning I intend to do today. You will remain in jail till I'm ready to talk to you again in the morning. But before they take you back to your cell, I'll have them bring in your wife, if you like."

"Thank you," said Stephen, his hands clenching in his effort to control himself.

The constable turned to Bill.

"You may go," he said curtly. "But I'll be wanting you again, so don't leave town."

"Yes, sir," said Bill humbly.

"Send in Mrs. Burke," said the sheriff to the deputy who was showing old Bill out.

Stephen stood up, his dark eyes fastened on the door. If Lucy still loved him and believed in him, he could stand anything, he thought. It seemed to him if he could only hold her in his arms again, everything would be all right.

But when the deputy at last returned, she was not with him.

"Mrs. Burke has gone home with her father," he said. "And when we telephoned that the prisoner was ready to see her, the answer was that she's not coming."

"She — won't — come!" gasped Stephen, his face ghastly. "Then my old man lied and her father told the truth. Lucy is through with me!"

"Ready to go back to your cell, Burke?" demanded the policeman.

Stephen laughed bitterly. "Take me anywhere you please! I've lost the only thing that matters."

CHAPTER XI

LUCY could not doubt when she saw her mother that she was at death's door. Her face was ghastly in its pallor. But she was conscious. She held out her arms to her daughter with a piteous cry.

"Don't leave me, Lucy!" she cried. "Promise me, you won't leave me until the end."

The girl knelt by the bed and took the cold hand in hers, cradled it against her cheek.

"I won't leave you, mother," she promised.

What else could she do? After all, this was her mother and she was dying. Every few minutes her body quivered with a paroxysm of pain. Her lips were blue, her breathing a moan of pain that nearly broke Lucy's heart.

"Is there no hope, doctor?" whispered Joseph Crane.

The doctor pursed his lips.

"Lucy, come away with me," he pleaded. "Stephen will not send for you. He did this crime to get money for another woman. Have you no pride? No shame?"

"One can never tell with angina," he said. "Each attack may prove fatal. On the other hand, the patient may rally this time. It all depends on your wife's resistance to the disease and her heart's ability to pull her through."

Lucy's father, tears streaming down his cheeks, patted her arm.

"She'd stopped trying before you came, my dear," he said. "Now she's trying to live for you."

No, Lucy could not have left her mother that night. Her life hung by a thread and the thread was in the girl's hands. Each time the spasms of pain came on, Lucy held her mother in her arms and smoothed back her hair and called her endearing names. Each time the sick woman rallied under her daughter's affection.

"It's wonderful," said Dr. Blair. "You give her the strength to go on, Lucy."

"If she lives, she'll owe her life to you, daughter," put in Mr. Crane.

But what of Stephen? Lucy's heart

kept crying all through that anguished night. What was happening to the man she loved? Had he asked for her? Did he know why she was not at the jail? She could not stand the suspense.

"Haven't I had any word from Stephen, father?" she demanded.

Joseph Crane looked her straight in the eye.

"No," he said shortly. "Why should you? After what he's done, that scoundrel hasn't the nerve to face you!"

There was no way for Lucy to know about the message the deputy sent her. Joseph Crane had answered the phone with an uncompromising refusal. The fellow is a thorough reprobate, he told his consicence. The sooner Lucy breaks with him forever, the happier she'll be.

"Stephen Burke doesn't care anything about you, Lucy," said her father sternly. "If he had he wouldn't have brought this disgrace upon you. Nor would he have tried to run away and leave you."

"Stephen isn't a thief, father, and he was not trying to run away," insisted Lucy.

Her father shrugged his shoulders.

"He could always make you believe black is white," he muttered.

"Lucy, Lucy, where are you?" wailed her mother.

Lucy moved closer to the bed.

"I'm here, mother," she whispered. "I'll not leave you."

And so it went all night. If Lucy left her mother's side a minute, the dying woman called for her. The girl herself was almost ill from exhaustion.

She had not slept at all for two nights, and she had had a series of shocks, one after another.

"Let me get you something to eat, Lucy," pleaded Jonathan.

He had been there all along, doing everything he could to help. Jonathan is so good, thought Lucy, a real friend. Her father leaned on the younger man like a son.

"I'm not hungry, Jonathan," said Lucy.

But he went out to the kitchen and heated a bowl of soup for her, brought it into the sick room.

"You must keep up," he said. "You can't afford to get sick yourself."

No, she could not afford to be ill. She had to be strong. Her mother needed her. Stephen needed her. Lucy forced herself to drink the soup.

"Feel better?" asked Jonathan, gently.

She nodded. The hot, nourishing liquid revived her. But after a while weariness washed over her in a black sea.

It was all she could do to keep up. When she moved her feet, they felt as if there were weights attached to them. Her head was thick and confused. Her eyes burned in her drawn face.

"You are about at the end of your endurance," said Dr. Blair.

Lucy tried to smile. "I'm all right."

"You'd better go and lie down," he suggested.

She shook her head. "I promised mother I wouldn't leave her."

Just as day was breaking, Mrs. Crane fell at last into a natural sleep. The paroxysm of pain ceased. A tinge of color stole back into her wasted face. Her breathing grew easier.

"She'll live this time," said the doctor.

"Thank God! Thank God!" cried Joseph Crane.

Lucy had never seen her father go to pieces before. It terrified her. But

Jonathan helped the older man to a chair, and the doctor gave him a stimulant.

"He'll be all right when he gets some rest," said the doctor. "It's just the reaction after what he's been through."

LUCY, too, was reeling on her feet. Now that the danger to her mother was past for the time being, her limbs were as weak as water. But she had only one thought, to go to Stephen. She was free at last to return to the jail, to demand permission to talk to her husband.

But when she tried to walk, her feet fairly refused to carry her.

"Where are you going, Lucy?" asked Jonathan.

"To Stephen," she said.

Jonathan glanced meaningly at Dr. Blair, who was on old friend of his.

"You're in no condition to go anywhere," the doctor said gravely.

"But I've got to go to Stephen!" she cried. "He'll be wondering where I am. He needs me now, more than ever."

"What of your mother and father?" protested the doctor.

"Jonathan will take care of them till I come back, won't you, Jonathan?"

"You know I'll do anything I can for you, Lucy," he said.

"Dear Jonathan," she whispered gratefully.

"If you must go," said the doctor, "let me give you something to pick you up. Otherwise, I don't believe you can get through the day."

He dropped a white tablet into a glass of water and held the glass to her lips. I must be strong, I must get through the day for Stephen, Lucy thought, and made herself drain the glass. She imagined she felt better at once. At least, her head ceased to throb and her nerves stopped jumping.

"I'm going—to—be fine—now," she said in a slow, stammering voice.

For some reason the words were hard to speak. She started toward the door, but it seemed to be a dreadful distance. Her eyelids drooped; she swayed, she began to crumple to the floor.

Then Jonathan leaped forward and caught her.

"I'm — so — sleepy, Jonathan," she whispered. "But I mustn't—go to sleep. I've got to see—Stephen—"

Her voice trailed off. She went limp in Jonathan's arms.

"I gave her a sleeping powder," said the doctor. "God knows, she needed it. She'll sleep the clock around."

Jonathan gave the doctor a long look and then turned and carried Lucy into her own old room.

CHAPTER XII

AFTER a sleepless night, Stephen was again brought before the sheriff the next morning. There were hard lines about the young man's mouth. The day before, he had seemed dazed with despair, but he had changed overnight.

He was now defiant and reckless. He still protested that he was not guilty of robbing the mill safe, but he did it in a sarcastic, daredevil way which angered the sheriff and did Stephen's cause no good. It seemed to the officials that only a hardened criminal would act as Stephen was acting in the face of the accusations against him.

"Everybody warned me that you're a tough case, Burke," the sheriff said. "But the law can be tough itself. If you want to be hard-boiled, we'll accommodate you."

"That's your privilege," muttered Stephen. He hesitated. "I want to

know just one thing. Is my wife outside?"

"No."

"Has she been here since she went away with her father yesterday?"

"She has not."

"All right," said Stephen bitterly. "You can get as hard-boiled as you like. I don't care what happens to me."

Lucy had deserted him, he was convinced of it. She believed him guilty. She had not even given him a chance to deny it.

If Lucy had stood by him, he could have borne anything. But Lucy had not stood by him. She had gone back to her parents who hated him, who would stop at nothing to part them. To Stephen there was but one explanation. Lucy was through with him.

"She said she loved me," he thought bitterly, "but her love couldn't stand the test. It's just as Julia always said. Lucy needs to be sheltered and protected. I should never have married her. Jonathan Hills is the kind of man she ought to have."

The sheriff was as good as his word. Convinced that he had the guilty man in Stephen Burke, he was anxious to close the case in a hurry.

It was the most important case which had come up since he was in office. To wind it up in a hurry with no loose ends would be a feather in his official cap. Above all, he wanted a confession. And so that day he handled Stephen with all the brutality at his command.

"You might as well plead guilty, Burke, and get it over," he said a hundred times.

"But I'm not guilty," said Stephen with a reckless toss of his head. "Why should I do you the favor of saying so?"

"If you go to trial, you haven't a chance," insisted the sheriff. "The jury will convict you. You'll be sent up for fifteen years at least. If you'll save the state the expense of a long-drawn-out trial, I can get you off with ten or less."

"I'm not pleading guilty to something I didn't do," said Stephen shortly.

"You're only making it harder on yourself."

"When a man has lost everything," said Stephen, "he can't lose anything else. Fifteen or ten years, what is the difference? My life's done for!"

Dectective Hawks demanded to see the prisoner, but there was nothing he could do. Stephen was bitter and stubborn with him, too.

"They're going to railroad me to the penitentiary," he said. "But what the devil? I've always been an unlucky cuss!"

The sheriff did not allow the ex-detective to remain in the room. He was told that they were too busy to be bothered with outsiders. Jacob Hawks left, swearing to be back with a lawyer to look after Stephen's interests.

"A brace of lawyers can't get me out of this jam," said Stephen.

"That itself is as good as a confession," said the sheriff.

"But I'm not confessing," retorted Stephen with a mocking smile.

"Don't be too sure of that," snapped the officer.

He sent for Stephen's father, who had been drinking again. He admitted in his dull, stammering voice that he had been drowning his woes at the Blue Lion.

"Joe Winters and his daughter are good friends of yours, Stephen, my boy," he mumbled. "They said to tell

you they'll look after me as long as you have to stay in jail."

"They're likely to have you on their hands a long time," muttered Stephen.

The sheriff glared at Bill.

"If you can persuade your son to confess, you will be doing us all a good turn," he said. "One the law won't forget the next time you get into trouble."

"How can Stephen confess," cried Bill. "He ain't guilty!"

"He's as guilty as hell, and you know it!" rasped the sheriff.

Bill shook his tousled head. His bleary eyes filled with tears and he put his shaky hands out pleadingly.

"My boy ain't done nothing wrong," he stammered.

"Then where did you get that money?"

"I don't know," mumbled Bill.

"If your son didn't steal it, you did!"

"Confess! Confess!" they hammered at him. And within, his own thoughts were hammering: "Confess. That's the only way to save your father!"

Stephen jumped to his feet, his hands clenched.

"You can't lay this off on my old man!" he cried furiously.

"Can't I?" murmured the sheriff.

"Whoever is guilty, he had nothing to do with it!" exclaimed Stephen.

"The money was found on him."

"It was planted on him to get me into trouble," snapped Stephen.

"How would you like to see your father in jail, Burke?" asked the sheriff.

Stephen's face was deathly white. "You can't do that," he whispered. "He wouldn't live a month."

"Of course, if you confess and tell us where you hid the rest of the money, we'd be willing to forget your father's part in the crime," insinuated the sheriff.

"I can't tell you where I hid the money because I never had it," answered Stephen desperately.

"If you continue to deny us," said the sheriff sternly, "I'll send your father to the penitentiary with you, Burke, as an accessory after the crime."

"You couldn't be that heartless!"

"Will you confess, then?"

"Don't you confess nothing on my account, Stephen," said Bill, straightening his shambling shoulders. "Let them send me to jail if they want. What if I don't last the month out? I wouldn't be no loss to anybody. But you've got a wife to think of."

"Have I?" asked Stephen bitterly. "Lucy's through with me for life."

"I don't believe it!" cried Bill. "that girl is as true as steel, and she loves you, boy."

"She's gone back to her folks," said Stephen. "I guess she wishes she'd never left them. She hasn't been near me since I was arrested."

"She has too—" began old Bill.

But at that moment a deputy knocked at the door.

"There is a lady out here, demanding to see the prisoner," he said.

"Lucy!" cried Stephen, springing to his feet, his face radiant again.

He felt as if a stone had rolled off his heart. For the first time since he saw Lucy's father the day before, Stephen could breathe without pain.

"Lucy, Lucy, my darling, my sweet!" he was whispering to himself.

But the girl who followed the policeman into the room was not Lucy. It was Julia Winters.

SHE smiled at Stephen, and then at the sheriff, to whom she handed a note.

"From Constable Peters," she said. "I want to talk to the prisoner alone a few minutes."

The sheriff read the note and he and Julia exchanged a glance. "All right," he said, moving over to the window out of earshot.

Julia turned brightly to Stephen, her green eyes sparkling.

"All your friends haven't run out on you, Stephen," she said.

"So I see," he muttered, sinking back into his seat, his mouth tortured and white with pain.

"Did your old man tell you that we're taking care of him while you're in jail?" she asked.

"Yes, he told me," said Stephen dully. "You're very kind."

"I'm not like that wife of yours," she sneered. "I don't desert my pals when they're in jam."

Stephen winced. "Lucy believes me guilty?" he asked.

"Yes," said Julia, "it's hard to tell you, but she does."

"You've talked to her?"

"No, but everybody knows she's gone back to her father and mother."

"And they hate me," said Stephen. "I guess Lucy wouldn't have gone back to them unless she hated me, too."

"I tried to tell you all along that she wasn't in love with you, Stephen," said Julia. "If Lucy loves anyone, it's Jonathan Hills."

"Yes," said Stephen, "you told me. Everybody told me she was made for Jonathan. But I didn't believe it. I can't believe it yet."

"Jonathan spent the night at her father's house last night," added Julia spitefully. "While you were lying in a cell, Stephen, he was there, making love to your wife."

Stephen's face blazed. "I don't believe that, either!"

She laid her hand caressingly upon his arm, but he drew away.

"You should be able to tell now who really loves you, Stephen, your wife or I," she said. "She's quit you cold when you needed her most. While *I* am doing everything I can for you and your father."

"Lucy is the woman I love," said Stephen. "I'll never love anyone else. You should know that by now."

Her green eyes were furious. 'You've lost her!" she spat at him.

"Yes, I've lost her," he repeated in a low voice.

"She'll divorce you and marry Jonathan! See if she doesn't!"

"Don't talk about it!" cried Stephen, springing up. "I can't stand it."

But Julia raged on and on.

"She doesn't deserve you! No woman who deserts her man when he's in trouble deserves to be loved the way you love Lucy, Stephen."

"Lucy isn't to blame," he said dully. "She can't help it if she's made that way."

"You ought to hate the ground she walks on!"

"I could never hate her."

When Julia had gone, a baffled look upon her handsome face, the sheriff returned to the attack. This time he was determined to carry his point.

"Have you made up your mind, Burke?" he demanded. "Will you confess? Or are you going to let me land your poor father in prison beside you?"

Stephen drew a long shivering breath.

"My old man isn't to blame for any of this," he said. "You'll put him in jail over my dead body."

"Then you intend to confess?" cried the sheriff eagerly.

"Don't you do it, my boy!" pleaded Bill. "Let the police do anything they like, but don't you say you done something you never done. I ain't scared of nothing they can do to me."

"You'll feel differently, old man, when you've had a taste of prison life," murmured the sheriff.

Stephen's face was ravaged by despair. He had lost Lucy, he thought. Some day she would divorce him and marry Jonathan Hills. The very foundations of his life had crumbled away. He did not believe that anything could happen which would hurt him more than he was already hurt. And there was his father, poor shambling Bill Burke whom Stephen had looked after ever since he was a little ragged boy.

"Give me a little while to think," he said hoarsely. "Just leave me alone for a few minutes."

The sheriff nodded. "I'll be back in a quarter of an hour," he said.

He beckoned to Bill and they went out of the room together. The sheriff locked the door behind him. Stephen sank back into his chair and covered his face with his hands.

CHAPTER XIII

NOT until late afternoon did Lucy wake from her drugged sleep. At first she could not remember anything, even after she recognized her old bedroom at home. Then it all came back with a rush. Stephen, *her* Stephen, was in jail!

Still giddy and a little dazed, she staggered to her feet. When she saw how late it was, she could hardly believe her eyes. She had been asleep more than twelve hours. And in the meanwhile what had happened to Stephen?

She was panting as she ran down the hall. Her eyes were wild with fear when she burst into the room where her father sat talking with Jonathan.

"You shouldn't have let me sleep all day!" she cried frantically. "I wanted to go to Stephen. Oh, why didn't someone wake me?"

"You were exhausted, Lucy," protested Jonathan. "You had to rest."

"Has Stephen sent for me?" she cried. "Surely by now he has asked for me!"

Her father scowled. "I imagine after the way he has treated you, you're the last person on earth that scoundrel wishes to see," he said sourly. "You haven't even inquired about your mother, Lucy. Doesn't it mean anything to you, how ill she's been?"

At that moment nothing meant anything to Lucy except her feverish anxiety to get to Stephen. But she could not have been so cruel as to refuse to see her mother.

Mrs. Crane still looked dreadfully weak, although she was out of danger. She tried to keep Lucy there.

"Don't go away," she whispered.

It was difficult to deny her, but the girl steeled her heart.

"I've go to go," she said. "Stephen is my husband."

"You'll come back?" begged her mother.

"Yes," said Lucy gently. "I'll be back as soon as I can."

She fairly ran to the police station, and she was out of breath and very white when she came up to the man at the desk. It was a different deputy from the day before.

"Won't you let me see my husband now?" she pleaded. "I've got to!"

He shook his head. "There's a lady in there now, talking to him," he said, "I don't believe the sheriff will let anyone else in today."

Lucy was trembling from head to foot.

"What lady is in there?" she cried.

"Miss Julia Winters."

"Oh!" cried Lucy in a strangled voice. "They let him see Julia Winters, but they won't let his wife in! It isn't fair! It isn't fair!"

"I suppose he asked for her," said the police officer.

"And he hasn't asked for me?"

"Not so far as I know."

"Oh!" she cried again. "Oh, Stephen, how could you?"

She stumbled over to the bench where she had sat the day before. People had told her a hundred times that Julia Winters was the kind of girl Stephen really liked. And now in the worst crisis of his life, apparently it was to her that Stephen had turned.

"If he loved me, he would want to see me," Lucy told herself.

If Stephen cared for her at all, surely he would want her now. She needed so terribly to have him tell her that he was not guilty. She needed the reassurance of his arms, his kisses. Yet it was Julia Winters who was permitted to see him.

"I'm his wife and he's forgotten I'm alive," Lucy told herself miserably. "Just as everyone said he would, sooner or later."

When the door into the sheriff's office opened and Julia came out, Lucy got to her feet and advanced to meet the other girl. Julia stared at her with a sneering smile.

"How can they let you talk to Stephen," cried Lucy, "and refuse to allow me in the room?"

"You poor little fool," murmured Julia, "Stephen took that money for me!"

"It isn't true," whispered Lucy, the blood draining from her heart.

"Before he was married to you a month, he was tired of you," sneered the other woman.

"I don't believe you—"

"Remember the night he took me out in his car?" asked Julia. "The night we didn't get home till midnight?"

"It wasn't Stephen's fault," said Lucy, her lips quivering. "You tricked him."

"That's what he made you think," sneered Julia. "But he lied to you. He's lied all along. He wanted me to run off with him that night."

"It isn't true!"

"He asked me, if he could get hold of some money, would I run away with him and never come back," went on Julia.

"Oh, Stephen, Stephen! How could you?" wailed Lucy.

"That's why he robbed the safe!" cried the other, in an exultant voice. "He did it to get money to go away with me."

"You're breaking my heart!"

"As soon as he got safely away with the money, he was going to send for me. If they hadn't caught him before he could hop that train, you'd never have seen or heard of him again."

"You're lying!" Lucy told her.

"You idiot," snapped Julia. "Go back to Jonathan Hills. He's your speed. Stephen is a wild hawk and you could never tame him, not in a thousand years! He doesn't care what happens to you. If he did, he'd have sent for you today instead of me."

"I don't believe it!" insisted Lucy, her brown eyes blazing. "Stephen isn't a thief and he never asked you to run off with him! I'll never believe any of this unless he tells me so with his own lips!"

Julia's face was convulsed with rage as she turned away.

DROPPING back on her hard wood bench, Lucy pressed her trembling hands to her lips. For a moment her faith in Stephen wavered. For a moment she had believed the terrible things Julia said. Then, in spite of everything, Lucy's love proved stronger than her doubts. She remembered Stephen's eyes looking into hers; she remembered their honeymoon and how gloriously happy they had been fixing up their little home.

"Stephen loves me and I love him!" she told herself. "And nothing can ever make me doubt him."

She saw the sheriff come down the hall with Bill Burke, but when she tried to speak to them, the constable brushed her aside.

"I can't let you see the prisoner now," he said sharply. "He has asked to be left alone awhile."

"Did you give him my message?" Lucy called after Bill, whom a policeman was hustling down the steps.

He looked back and nodded, but they gave him no chance to say anything.

Lucy went back to her dreary vigil on the bench. In a quarter of an hour

she saw the sheriff go back down the hall into the room Stephen was locked in. Perhaps they will let me see him now, she thought. But when she asked the man at the desk, he shook his head.

"The sheriff left word not to disturb them under any circumstances," he said. "He thinks he is on the point of breaking the case."

"Oh, then my husband will be free!" cried Lucy radiantly.

The deputy gave her a pitying look and said nothing.

A few minutes later Detective Hawks bustled into the police station. Lucy ran to meet him. He looked much more cheerful than the day before.

"Everything's going to be all right, my dear!" he exclaimed. "I've hired a lawyer to defend Stephen, one of the best in the state. He'll get the boy off, never fear."

"Oh, thank God! Thank God!" cried Lucy, clinging to his hand.

At that moment they heard a great bustle down the hall. People were talking very loud and running in and out of the sheriff's office.

"What is it?" asked Lucy. "What has happened?"

A deputy who was hurrying in at the door looked at her.

"Your husband has just confessed!" he exclaimed.

"No! No!" she protested. "He couldn't have! He's innocent!"

"He has signed a statement admitting his guilt."

Lucy gave a cry. "Oh, Stephen, Stephen! How could you?"

To Be Continued

What's in a Name?

By ADRIENNE PEABODY

YOUR fate lies in your name. Every letter of the name by which the world knows you is represented by a number, and the numbers tell the true story of your character and your destiny.

Know yourself, and you can meet the world with poise and courage. Mrs. Peabody, a numerologist of world-wide fame, is eager to help you to a life of greater happiness through increased self-knowledge.

THROUGH A STUDY OF YOUR NAME AND BIRTH DATE, SHE CAN TELL YOU WHAT 1937 HAS IN STORE FOR YOU — *See offer at end of this department.*

EVEN this early in the year we can see some of the forecasts for 1937 working out.

It was said in this department that it would be a wonderful year for women, and for politics and peace in general. President Roosevelt's good-will tour in South America was the first indication we had of this.

That women are coming to the foreground rapidly is noticeable in every field. We have a play with a cast of forty women, and everywhere women's peace organizations are springing up. More and more as the year progresses will this trend be apparent. Women will soon have positions of trust and power in every field, especially business and politics.

And, last but not least, there is the romantic aspect of "2," which is the number 1937 adds up to.

Judging by my mail the past few weeks, the readers of ALL-STORY are feeling this urge strongly. Anyway, the heart problems are more numerous than ever. Love—love—love, all kinds and sorts! Possessive and jealous love, unrequited love, and love which is all in the imagination.

Here is one of those letters so personal, we will not mention where it comes from:

DEAR ADRIENNE PEABODY:

How can I stop loving someone who does not love me? I have no right to love him as I am not divorced. I was born May 15. How can I overcome this desire of wanting to commit suicide?

DEAR MAY 15:

Your birth date shows a great deal of restlessness, and of course you cannot be happy with this duality in your love life. Make up your mind definitely whether you wish to separate from your husband and marry the "other man," or if you decide to "stay put" give up the other man. There is no other road to happiness.

Frequently marriages are readjusted, and another love comes into the life. But there is no happiness for anyone when there is deceit for a long period of time. It always deteriorates into loss of respect, and the "love" vanishes. After all, love which endures is based on something different from physical infatuation.

I believe if you straighten out your love life, and be honest with yourself, you can be absolutely happy again. And that will solve the question of suicide for you.

Another one from a very young girl:

DEAR MRS. PEABODY:

I was born June 9, 1921, and am going to high school. Just cannot seem to get adjusted to it, as I am a singer and artist. Then, too, I seem to fall in love easily, too easily.

Have been in love with a man, but found out recently that he is married, and now I think I am in love with another one. In fact I'm in love with two at once. My dad won't let me see them any more, but I cannot seem to do anything about it—loving them, I mean. Please help me.

MARGARET E.

DEAR MARGARET:

It's all right; you are just at the age where you are in love with love, more than with the individual.

You have too good a head to do anything really foolish, and it may make you feel better when I remind you that most all young girls your age become "boy conscious" about this time in their lives. Just be friendly, and realize that you want to wait for the right one.

And do stick to your schooling as long as you can. Many girls who have to work wish they could do the studying you are doing. Singing should be one of your accomplishments, but I think marriage will take its place as a main issue in your life. However, you should always keep up your music.

Another young girl writes me:

DEAR MRS. PEABODY:

My birth date is February 22, 1916. What I would like to know is what to do for my life work. At present I am doing housework and am not very contented.

I am always undecided what to do, and most of the time let someone else decide things for me. Then, too, I am a great worrier.

H. E

MY DEAR H. E.:

With your birth date you should certainly take a business course; you have more ability than you yourself realize.

And do make a resolution to make your own decisions from now on. Even if you seem to make mistakes, feel afterward that it was all life's experience. We all make them, and that is how we learn.

Don't be afraid of life. Your birth date shows you lack initiative to quite a degree, but you can learn that, and in a few years you will be a more forceful personality.

All happiness to you.

Here is one from a young man:

DEAR ADRIENNE PEABODY:

I am very much interested in a forecast of my future. At present I am

employed as an office worker, and although I like my work, there is something lacking. I wonder if I would be more successful in another profession.

I was born December 28, 1908.

C. G. P

MY DEAR C. G. P.:

Yes, your present signature is better for you, as Gregory, for a first name, is not so harmonious with your birth date.

Do not know what work you are doing, but your birth date shows me you would be a wonderful electrical or mechanical engineer, and I would encourage you in every way to fit yourself for this career.

A letter from the mid-West is next:

DEAR ADRIENNE PEABODY:

My birth date on April 13, 1918, has always caused me to wonder whether I was lucky or unlucky, and it seems to me I don't get out enough to really enjoy life.

My boy friend's birth date is March 16, 1918, and he means more to me than anything or anyone else. But he never remembers me on special occasions. He is a very hard person to understand, but says we will marry some day when he is better off financially. Then I have another friend who always remembers me on special occasions. But I don't love him.

Probably this letter sounds foolish to you, but these are true facts. I really don't know what to do. Would also like to be a beauty operator, but it costs too much.

GLORIA

DEAR GLORIA.

Your entire name is certainly an illustrious one, and why not let it make you feel you will be lucky, rather than unlucky? Your birth date coming on the thirteenth ("4") to a Numerologist merely means hard work, or application, especially during the early life. But things will be easier for you when you are older.

As for the boy friend, do you think it really so important to have him remember those special occasions? Some of the most devoted husbands I know always forget anniversaries, and never send flowers; but all the needful things of life are attended to, and they stand by in important moments.

Think you could arrange the beauty work study this year if you have a little more faith. There are ways of arranging to pay tuition over a period of time. Try it.

Yours in service,

ADRIENNE PEABODY

THIS COUPON AND A STAMPED SELF-ADDRESSED ENVELOPE MUST ACCOMPANY REQUEST FOR ANALYSIS

(Canadian readers, please send U. S. stamps, or coin. Readers from all other foreign countries should send International Reply Coupon, properly stamped by post office.)

ADRIENNE PEABODY,
ALL-STORY,
280 Broadway, New York, N. Y.

This coupon is not good after April 3, 1937

Kindly print or type the following information

Please send me your forecast of my destiny for 1937.

Name (as it was given you at birth).....

Name (as you sign it now).....

Birth Date (month, day and year).....

Address.....

RADIOSYNCRASIES

By HELEN KING

WHAT would you like to know about radio doings, on or off the air?
Just send your question to Helen King, All-Story Magazine, 280 Broadway, New York, N. Y. For personal reply, *be sure to enclose a stamped, self-addressed envelope.* (Canadians, send U. S. stamps, or coin.) Readers from all other foreign countries should send International Reply Coupon, properly stamped by post office.
Watch for handwriting analysis offer at end of this department!

THE mail has been gradually piling up with queries about Ted Weems. Like this reader's letter, for instance:

DEAR MISS KING:
I have seen Ted Weems and all the boys. Please ask 'em all who and what they are. I imagine they have a sense of humor.

Yours,
GRACIE

Okay, Gracie! For your benefit

MR. WEEMS GOES TO TOWN

For several years, Ted Weems has quietly gone about getting the reputation of having one of America's finest dance bands. Less touted than other orchestras, the Weems organization has finally found its place in the sun. Continually word comes that the Weems troupe has broken all records at the Trianon ballroom.

And now, step up and meet the boys! Let's see what makes them tick:

Ted Weems (trombone): "I was born in Pittsburgh, attended high school in Philadelphia. It was my recording of 'Somebody Stole My Gal' that really got us in the big leagues. I'm married, girls, and a proud papa." (You might have known!)

Art Weems (trumpet): "Of course, I'm the boss's brother. But on the side

I own a pretzel factory, and with the two jobs I naturally get twisted. Often I pick up a pretzel and try to blow through it."

Perry Como (vocalist): "I'm really a barber-shop baritone from Warren, Ohio. I used to shave all the dudes in my home town. Ted heard me while he was on a road tour of one-night stands. I sure play hot licks on a razor."

Elmo Tanner (guitar): "I started whistling because when I was a kid I had to pass a graveyard every night. I'm not related to Whistler's Mother." (He's single, ladies!)

"Red" Ingle: "I'm a triple-threat man — play fiddle, sax and hold a transport pilot's licence." (Also single.)

"Country" Washburne: "You know those tunes, 'Oh, Mona' and 'Jig Time'? Well, I wrote 'em, suh."

Ormond Downes: "I'm from Haddonfield N. J., and single, girls." (Another break for the gals!)

Art Winters says: "I do most of my talking behind my instrument."

From *Dick Cunliffe:* "I've been with Ted ten years, play nine different instruments and hail from McKeesport, Pa."

Pete Beilman chatters: "My favorite hobby? Dogs, hunting and platinum blondes, like Alice Faye."

Now you know them—get busy!

DOTS AND DASHES

Sedley Brown was a stuntman in the movies, doubling for stars in such daring sequences as jumping over cliffs. (But Sedley watches steps carefully.)

Radio engineers had to do a lot of experimenting before they were able to give Donald Dickson, the Saturday Night Party's new baritone, correct radio "production." Donald has the most powerful voice that has hit the microphone in many months. He now stands several feet away from the mike when he sings.

Marcia Davenport, opera broadcast commentator, is the daughter of Alma Gluck, the Metropolitan star, and the step-daughter of Efram Zimbalist, the violinist.

Mary Small received so many requests for her photograph that she has decided to reverse the process. She asks her listeners to send their pictures so she "can see what the audience looks like."

Fibber McGee and Molly were seventeen and sixteen respectively when they met at choir practice in Peoria, Ill., and promptly fell in love. At the same time, the United States entered the World War.

When the armistice came, Jim lost no time in leading Molly to the altar. They have two children.

HERE AND THERE

Laura Williams of the Williams Sisters Trio recently underwent an appendectomy. . . . The household of Author Carlton E. Morse of "One Man's Family" has been increased by two beautiful Persian kittens. . . . Ben Bernie loathes high hats, literal and otherwise, he himself never speaks unkindly of anyone, even though he tries hard to be uncomplimentary in public to Walter Winchell. . . . The ambition of Billy Idelson, the *Rush* on the "Vic and Sade" serial, is to become a movie star. . . . Betty Ito, the Japanese-American actress, just dotes on *tempura,* which is Japanese for fried shrimp . . . . Bess Johnson estimates that she spent forty-five dollars in telephone tolls before arranging her first radio audition.

ALTHOUGH most comedians have "gag writers," the only parts of his "Town Hall Tonight" shows that Fred Allen permits someone else to write are the alliterative and insulting introductions with which Harry Von Zell presents him to the audience every Wednesday. Harry spends a full evening with the dictionary, looking up fancy words to hurl at the lanky comic.

Keep your eye on your local movie. Phil Lord and the guests of his Sunday "We, the People" shows may soon be seen in a series of weekly movie shorts!

SCOOP! The *Mrs. Pinchwhistle* you hear on the Streamliners program is really your old friend, *Mrs. Pennyfeather!*

BELIEVE it or not, dead people may be on the air!

A story of how John Philip Sousa conducted a band long after his death was told recently by Frank Simon, Sousa's former assistant conductor. It happened almost two years ago, when a group of bandsmen had assembled on the stage. On a screen in front of them was flashed a motion picture of the March King, conducting one of his own famous marches. The same arrangement was on the music stands as that which was being used by Sousa when the motion picture was made; thus the number was played as perfectly as though Sousa had been conducting in the flesh. If it can be done in the movies, radio will copy!

DIDJAKNOW THAT

Charles Butterworth never smiles? When the studio audience laughs at one of his sallies, he just frowns at them.

Ed Wynn has been renewed for another thirteen-week cycle by his Saturday night sopnsors.

Ditto McNamee and Don Voorhees' band.

Helen Hayes has announced she will take her Broadway hit, "Victoria Regina," on a cross-country tour next fall—which means her radio shows will emanate from a different city each week.

Jack Benny had a recording made of Don Wilson's jovial laugh at rehearsal last week. He wanted a genuine guffaw, so he didn't tip Don off. Jack says he wants to keep the laughter for his old age.

Fred Allen's most characteristic unconscious mannerism is snapping his knuckles! He makes such a racket the engineer had to signal him to stop, during one of his programs. The wide-open microphones made the snaps sound like gun shots.

From Chicago: Betty Winkler carries an extra pair of stockings in her purse so that she can change if the pair she happens to be wearing "runs." . . . Harold Peary, of the NBC Tom Mix Serial has a weakness for big, black cigars. . . . Walter Blaufuss, conductor of the NBC Breakfast Club, took up medicine when he broke his thumb some years ago and could no longer play the piano. Two years later one of his instructors performed a successful operation on the thumb and returned Blaufuss to his beloved music.

Kenny Baker recently captured a deadly black widow spider at his home in San Fernando Valley and brought it to the NBC studio in a pint milk bottle. Playful Don Wilson substituted another milk bottle and pandemonium broke loose. Everybody at re-

hearsal thought Kenny's pet had escaped. "If you must bring animals to the studio," admonished Jack, "bring a hyena. At least, he'll help us with the laughs."

A miss is as good as a contract, says George Griffin, who recalls how he got his start as a soloist. He was singing with a church choir, and failed to notice a musical rest. The other members of the choir stopped, but he continued singing. As a result he was asked to repeat the selection as a solo.

Marge Morin of NBC's Morin Sisters, has taken over the additional duties as arranger for the King's Jesters. She will do mostly quartet arrangements of sweet songs. Incidentlly, it's Marge who does those smooth arrangements for the Morin trio.

GOSSIP

There isn't a drugstore cowboy, or cowgirl, in the group comprising The Westerners heard on NBC's Log Cabin Dude Ranch. . . . Edgar Bergen, the ventroloquist appearing on the Rudy Vallee Variety Hour, is a graduate of the Chautauqua circuits. . . . Ireene Wicker is in her seventh year as NBC's Singing Lady. That's a career in radio. . . . Frances White learned to sing as a child under the tutelage of her mother, former opera singer. . . . Parker Fennelly is the author of "Fulton of Oak Falls," in which George M. Cohan will star.

MARY LIVINGSTONE takes great delight in ribbing Kenny Baker about his ringleted curly hair. "He must have got it short-waved," cracked Jack Benny's better half last Sunday at rehearsal.

After a broadcast of the Kraft Music Hall, the discarded scripts look as if they had been written with a pencil and corrected with a typewriter. The reason is that Bob Burns and Bing Crosby get off some of their best jokes, ad libbing and ribbing each other at rehearsal. Program advisers usually insist that the jokes be written into the script.

Did you notice that Ben Grauer, announcer on the Robert (Believe-It-Or-Not) Ripley broadcast, missed a cue at rehearsal? (He was dancing at the side of the stage to the rhythm of Ozzie Nelson's orchestra with Shirley Lloyd, the vocalist).

Portland Hoffa will not sign an autograph unless her husband, Fred Allen, has penned his signature first. If a fan seeks hers and has not secured Fred's, she makes a point of getting it before she puts down her monicker. And then she signs only her first name.

JUST BETWEEN US

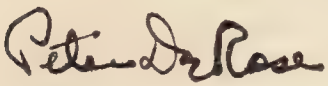
Jessie: Here are the characters on the "Just Plain Bill" program: ***Bill,*** Arthur Hughes; ***Nancy,*** Ruth Russell; ***Kent,*** William Quinn; ***Mr. Harrison,*** Harold Elliott; ***Elmer Eeps,*** Joe Latham; ***Mrs. Eeps,*** Effie Palmer; ***Althea,*** Patricia Calvert.

M. P. T.: Leo Reisman is a product of Boston, where he started his musical career at the age of twelve, plugging tunes on his violin for song publishers. His fiddling eventually brought him to the stage, where he was known as the boy soloist. His first appearance was at a theater in his home city. At seventeen he organized his own dance band and played at many of the hotels in New England, establishing himself as a favorite there and finally becoming nationally known through his radio work.

R. E. F.: Ray Heatherton was a member of the famed Paulist Choristers boys' choir. He also sang with the Polyphonic Sextette, a group specializ-

ing in medieval songs. His entire background consisted of classical music. It was a chance hearing by Paul Whiteman that brought him to the fore. Ray sang with Whiteman on the conductor's first radio commercial. Since then he has been heard on many radio programs and on the stage.

Tessie: The cast of "Love and Learn" is as follows: *Dick Harper,* Allyn Joslyn; *Sue,* Florence Freeman; *Judy,* Helene Dumas; *Paul,* James Meighan.



Here 'tis, the signature of the hubby of May Singhi Breen, as per promise. Radio's happiest couple, they are called, and certainly they are one of radio's finest couples.

Even as their writings are vastly different, and seem to balance each other, so are their characters. A happy medium is reached between the two of them.

Look at your own script. Is it small, like Peter's? If so, there's deep thinking power, and plenty of concentration going on within you. Is it backhand, like the composer's? Answer "yes" and you'll be told you are somewhat reserved; that is, you find it difficult to get intimate with anyone you haven't known very long.

And of course if you see a small "t"-crossing, you will be lacking in aggressiveness. You won't like having to force yourself on anyone, nor will you enjoy fighting unnecessarily. Always you will try to smooth things over, gently.

Although he is one of radio's pioneers, and most prominent in composing circles, Peter DeRose maintains a quiet, friendly personality. Nothing ruffles him, and he ruffles nobody. You know—the kind of man you read about in books, but seldom find yourself!

MISS HELEN KING,
ALL-STORY MAGAZINE,
280 Broadway, New York, N. Y.

This coupon is not good after April 3, 1937. A stamped self-addressed envelope must be enclosed when forwarding.

I enclose handwriting specimen for advice and analysis.

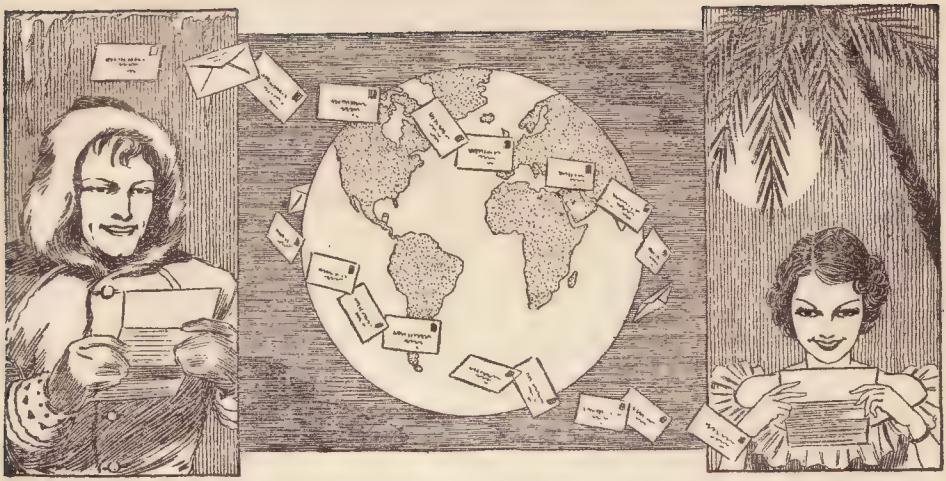
Name.....Age.....

Address.....

.....

THIS COUPON AND A STAMPED SELF-ADDRESSED ENVELOPE MUST ACCOMPANY REQUEST FOR ANALYSIS

(Canadian readers, please send U. S. stamps, or coin. Readers from all other foreign countries should send International Reply Coupon, properly stamped by post office.)



The Lonesome Club

Conducted by DOROTHEA DALE

MAKE FRIENDS! JOIN THE LONESOME CLUB!

JUST write your plea for pals to Mrs. Dale, care of the ALL-STORY, 280 Broadway, New York City, and she will publish it at the earliest possible date.

When you write to other pen pals, enclose your letter in a plain, stamped envelope, telling Mrs. Dale, in a separate note, for whom your letter is intended. Be sure to sign your full name and address to all Lonesome Club correspondence.

Girls may write only to girls; boys may write only to boys.

(Canadians, send U. S. stamps, or coin. Readers from all other foreign countries should send International Reply Coupon, properly stamped by post office.)

Dear Mrs. Dale:

Young married woman of 23 who likes nothing more than making new friends. My husband is in the U. S. Coast Guard and I am employed as a secretary in a brokerage firm. I stand 5 feet 7, weigh 121. Have dark brown hair and large gray eyes. Am fond of letter writing, dancing, reading. Love all sorts of music from the most modern to the highest type of opera. Won't you help me find new friends, especially other service men's wives? Our life is a lonesome one, and we should have lots in common. Everyone who cares to write is welcome, though. Thank you.

Service Man's Wife of N. Y.

Am a shut-in, very lonesome. Married woman, 47 years young. I read, write, sew, embroider, crochet and piece quilts. Would love to hear from others similarly engaged, or from anyone who cares to write and spread a little cheer in my lonely life. So please fill my mail box.

Lonesome Shut-In of Ga.

American girl of sweet 16 who is interested in people of every nationality. I am a sophomore in high school, and at present I'm taking up a "Fine Fit" course. Almost everything that modern girls enjoy, I enjoy, too. People seem to consider me pleasant and witty. I hope some of you will take the time to write to me. If you do, I promise to write you a long letter.

Rochester Jessie.

Girl of 18. A blonde. Am 5½ feet tall, weigh

120. I am a sophomore in college, fairly smart. Have as hobbies swimming and ballroom dancing. Love to answer all letters, as I am lonely. Am an only child—quite spoiled—as all my enemies tell me. My friends know better. I promise to answer all letters promptly and will try to be interesting. Have traveled a lot.

Heart-of-America Girl.

Peppy girl of 15. Am slim and tall—5 feet 6. Have brown curly hair, blue eyes, and am considered attractive. My favorite sports are: swimming, skating, horseback riding, dancing, bicycling and tennis. My ambition is to be an aviatrix. I live in a small Western town and I am just dying to correspond with girls my age all over the world. However, I should especially like to correspond with girls in Fargo, North Dakota, as my family is planning on moving there next summer. I will exchange snapshots and promise to answer all letters.

Montana Bettee.

Young lady of 28. Married. Like housework, music and all sports. My nickname is Bert. I would like pals from all over the U. S. A., and from foreign countries, too. Also would like to exchange snaps and postcard views of my State.

Bert from Sunny California.

Woman of 30—5 feet 9. Weigh 165. Married, and live in the largest city in the world. I believe I'm the lonesomest person to be found. I love to read, write, and go to the movies. But above everything else, I love to collect stamps from all over the world. I have traveled through 20 different countries. Also lived in Bermuda for two years. I hope to hear from loads of stamp collectors, any age, from anywhere. Promise to answer all letters.

Anna of N. Y. C.

Young married woman of 22. I have a little girl of 3. I have brown hair, blue eyes, weigh about 119. I am interested in all sports. Love to read and collect movie stars' pictures. Would like to have English-speaking pen pals from all over the world. Will answer all letters.

Edith from Little Rhodie.

English lass with light eyes, brown hair. Very fond of sports. Also, would very much like to have some pen pals.

Sidney of England. (5c postage.)

Girl of 12. Have brown hair that is curly, and brown eyes. I am interested in all sports and receiving letters. Considered good-looking and have very few friends. What's the matter, girls? Pep up. Would like to hear from girls from 12 to 14.

Curly of Md.

It is people like you who help people like me to make friends, and I think it is a great institution of companionship for modern youth. I am a newcomer, a young man, coming to you to bring about a change of life for me, namely: a life with friends. Hitherto, I have been prevented by my family from making friends. But now my family is broken up by death of my father and I have had to get out and work, which I am doing. This breaking up of the family leaves me very lonely indeed, especially out in this desolate region. I had never known what was going on before, but one night I picked up an ALL-STORY magazine lying out in the mud. I cleaned it off and the first page I opened was the Lonesome Club. I read it through, and I became interested. Am 5 feet 4. Have curly, dirty blond hair and weigh 135. Am considered good-looking but that doesn't count. My favorite sports are: handball, tennis, baseball. Hobbies are: singing, collecting old and new songs. Play the mandolin, and hope to play all the other instruments in time. Would like to learn how to swim and dance. My work is carpentry. I am very interested in architecture.

Wally, the Hermit of L. I.

Girl of 13. Am 5 feet 2½ and in the 8th grade. Have brown eyes and brown hair. My sports are swimming, dancing and tennis. My hobbies are collecting movie stars' pictures and saving souvenirs. Would like to write to girls all over the world, especially girls from Hawaii or Canada.

Erkie of Penna.

Attention, all you who are in search of a sincere pal. Here is a young colored girl away out in Los Angeles who enjoys doing anything that pleasure can be derived from. I enjoy all sports, but my special is tennis. My hobbies are reading and dancing. I like the latter better, for I specialize in tap dancing. Will exchange snaps with those who wish. Come on, gang, let's get going!

Buddy of Calif.

Station l-o-n-e-s-o-m-e calling for pen pals who really and truly want to be friends for a lifetime. You who write to me will never regret it, for I promise faithfully to answer every postcard or letter I receive. I am 20, shy and reserved: therefore make few friends. I shall compose a poem and send to each of you who write to me. It will be in honor of our future friendship. Please don't let this plea be a disappointment, as so many things in my life seem to be.

Brown-Eyed Helen of Ohio.

Rather lonesome girl of 14 years and 6 months. 5 feet 10. Weigh about 160 or 165. Am considered fairly good-looking. Will answer all

letters. I am very much interested in outdoor and indoor sports. I have no definite future ahead. Please fill my mailbox.

Blue-Eyed Martha of S. D.

Hello, girls! Here's an S.O.S. from a young colored miss way out in California who has a yen for pals from every known part of the world. Everyone, no matter what you like to do, will be heartily welcomed, as I like to do just about everything. My specialties are dancing, reading, going to movies, and playing basketball. My hobbies are writing short stories and nice, long chummy letters. Come on! Don't be bashful, girls. Will exchange snaps if you wish.

Anxious Jerrie of Calif.

Here I come! Just a happy-go-lucky girl of 17. I have blue eyes, blond hair, am about 5 feet tall, and weigh 94. Am always considered the life of the party and have lots of friends, but would like to have still more. Come on, all you girls, especially those who travel a lot. I wish to meet my pals in person. Am interested in movies, music, dancing and all outdoor sports. I'll be waiting for your letters.

Beulah of N. C.

Girl of 14. Have brown hair. 5 feet 3. Am nice looking and have a right hand that is just itching to write to someone. I am interested in all sports, especially golf, as I live on a golf course. I think that I can make my letters interesting. Won't someone take the hint and just write to

Elmer of Penna.

Girls! How about writing to a Canadian girl who craves pen pals? I'm nearly 16, 5 feet 3, weigh 113½ and have gray eyes and brown wavy hair. Favorite hobby is collecting autographed movie stars' pictures. Love both indoor and outdoor sports. My secret ambition is to be an aviatrix. I'll exchange snapshots with all who write. Please, girls, write to

Bunny of Ontario.

Girl of 14. Am 5 feet 5. Weigh 119. Have blue eyes and dark blond hair. My favorite sports are swimming and horseback riding. My hobby is stamp collecting. I would like to hear from pals from all parts of the world.

Lois of Hartford.

Am a crippled girl. But I don't let that keep me from smiling. My ambition is to keep others smiling, too. So please, won't you pals from the Hawaiian Islands and Mexico and other foreign countries, as well as my own U. S. A., write to me? I'll be waiting for your letters.

Sunny of N. Y.

Young man of 27. 5 feet 6. Fond of all sports. Most of all I like traveling and dancing. Have worked in, and visited several large cities. I'm now in my home town, only a stone's throw from the coal mines. Would like to hear from people of all ages from New York and Los Angeles.

G. of Penna.

Am a 15-year-old redhead of Irish descent. Have the familiar old Irish temper, but get over it quickly. Am easy to make friends with. Will welcome pen pals. How about it? Please write, won't you?

Joanne of Penna.

Young girl of 16, of Scotch descent. I am very much interested in Hollywood and the movies. More than anything else in the world, I wish to become an actress. I am collecting movie stars' pictures, of which I have 5,815,620 and they are of nearly 900 different actors. Am 5 feet tall, and weigh 99 pounds. Am a brunette and have blue eyes and fair complexion. I enjoy all outdoor sports, especially swimming, tennis and horseback riding. I'd enjoy having all kinds of friends any age and from anywhere, but mostly those in the movies, stage or radio or interested in any of these. I promise to answer all letters promptly and will exchange snapshots with those who care to. I promise to try to be a sincere and true pal.

Scotchie of Hollywood.

Girl of 16. Just barely 5 feet. Have dark brown hair. My eyes are green, and I have long, dark eyelashes. I am considered attractive and have lots of personality. I love all outdoor sports. Bicycle riding is my favorite sport. Even though I haven't a bike of my own. I usually ride my friend's bicycle. I would like to hear from friends all over the world. Would like friends from 15 to 18.

Fritz of Penna.

Young French-Canadian girl from Ottawa, who is longing for new friends to write to. I have auburn hair and blue eyes. 5 feet 3, weigh 108. 22 years. My favorite hobby is to learn how to count in different languages. I am a stenographer in a large departmental store in this city. It my interest you that I have won the title of "Miss Personality" for the past four years. I love dancing and all outdoor sports. My favorite is fancy skating. I promise to answer all letters, and will exchange pictures. Would like to hear from some pen pals from New York City and foreign countries.

Canadian Frenchie.

Brunette girl. 5 feet 8. Age 16. And quite good looking—at least that's what I'm told. Would you please put my plea in the ALL-

STORY? I'll be looking out for it. Well, thanks ever so much.

Mary of Scotland. (5c postage.)

Thanks to you, Mrs. Dale, I have some very nice pen pals. But is there a girl anywhere who enjoys the same hobby I do? It is goldfish and their care. I have several aquariums of goldfish and a few tropicals. Perhaps there is another girl somewhere who would like to write to me. I'm interested in other things, too. Movies, reading, and a little handwork. I'm 24, quiet and shy. Would rather write letters than talk to people face to face.

Pennsylvania Ruth.

Girl of 23. 5 feet 5. Light brown hair, gray eyes. My hobbies are dancing, listening to my radio, baseball games and driving a car. I have traveled some and expect to travel more this year. Will tell you about it. I work in a mill here in Pennsylvania and enjoy my work very much. Here's hoping to hear from pals all over.

Mary of Penna.

Here is a girl from Cascade, Idaho, a mountain town. I have blond hair, brown eyes, weigh about 80 pounds. My height is 5 feet, ½ inch. My hobby is writing letters. Would like to exchange snapshots with any of you. I like most any kind of sport. Come on, girls.

Mildred of Idaho.

Peppy girl of 13. I have hazel eyes and brown hair. Height, about 5 feet 2½. Weight, 115. I would like to exchange snapshots. I like all outdoor and indoor sports. I like horseback riding, fishing and skiing the most. I can play a clarinet. Am in the high school band. Write to me, all of you.

Charley of Idaho.

Boy of 17. Collect postal cards and snapshots. Will gladly exchange snaps with all who answer. I live in Maryland and am anxiously awaiting many letters from all over the world. Promise to answer all letters promptly.

A Marylander.

Young man of 25. Have brown hair, blue eyes and am rather tall and slim. Crave to hear from song writers, musicians, show people and radio stars. I'm a song writer and have a little experience along this line. Like nearly all sports, but baseball is my favorite. Have collections of sheet music, post cards, books, coins and stamps. I have been told I write very interesting letters, so let me prove that I can do so. Will send you all a snap, and to the first five I'll send a gift. Fill up my mail box with your letters, and I'll fill yours with good old-fashioned sunshine. Just sling along that penful of ink to

Flashing Kid of N. J.

Reader's Choice Coupon

The Editors, ALL-STORY MAGAZINE,
280 Broadway, New York City.

This coupon good only until June 26, 1937.

Here is what I think about the stories in this issue:

Love Me Again.....

The Love Trap.....

The Rivals.....

Girl in a Million.....

Stowaway Kiss.....

Afraid of Love.....

Cupid Has a Word for It.....

Desert Girl.....

The Town's Bad Boy.....

Name .....

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Genuine Blue-White Diamonds—Fine Watches Yours For Only a Few Cents a Day!

JUST send your name and address with only $1.00 deposit—stating age, occupation and if possible 1 to 2 credit references. All dealings strictly confidential. **No direct inquiries — no red tape — no interest or extras — no C.O.D. to pay on arrival.**

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If you can surpass our values anywhere, just return your selection and we will promptly refund your full deposit. If fully satisfied after **10 Day Trial Period** pay only the small amount stated each month.

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Every ring or watch carries ROYAL'S written guarantee backed by 42 years of fair and square dealing. **Make your selection now — take 10 months to pay.**

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3 Genuine DIAMONDS

$2.35 a Month

LJ-1 . . . Exquisite engagement ring of 14K Solid White or Yellow Gold. Fiery, genuine blue-waite center diamond; matched diamond on each side. (Specify color gold desired.) **Only $2.35 a month.**

Both for $29.75

Only $2.87 a month

4 Genuine Diamonds

LJ-6 . . . Perfectly matched "Queen of Hearts" engagement and wedding ring ensemble of 14K Solid White or Yellow Gold. Engagement ring is set with a fiery, genuine blue-white diamond, and the wedding ring with 3 matched diamonds. Specify gold desired. **Both for only $2.87 a month.**

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LJ-6A . . . Engagement Ring only . . . $19.75
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$1.00 Down — Balance 10% Monthly

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LJ-3 . . . BULOVA'S "Goddess of Time"! Guaranteed 17 Jewel BULOVA movement. Tiny, square case in charm and color of natural gold. Silk cord bracelet. **Only $2.87 a month.**

Only $27.50

Ladies' 7 Diamond CLUSTER RING

Only $2.65 a month

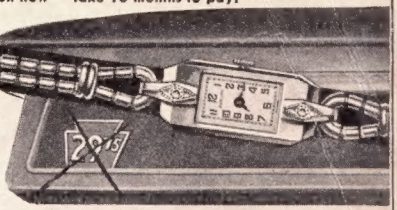
LJ-2 . . . Dazzling ladies' square prong cluster ring, expertly set with seven finely matched fiery, genuine diamonds. Looks like a $450.00 solitaire. 14K Solid Yellow Gold ring. **Only $2.65 a month.**

$14.50

A ROYAL SENSATION!

Only $1.35 a month

LJ-4 . . . Ladies, baguette type wrist watch in streamlined permanent waite case; fully guaranteed movement. Matched bracelet. **Only $1.35 a month.**



2 Diamond Baguette

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LJ-9 . . . One of America's smartest Baguette wrist watches at an especially low price. Elegantly styled, modern lifetime case set with 2 genuine diamonds; fully guaranteed movement. Smart link bracelet to match. **Reduced to $19.75 — only $1.87 a month.**

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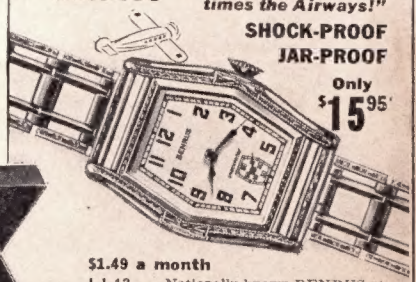
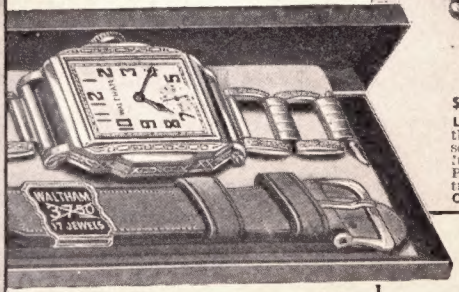


Only $15.95

$1.49 a month

LJ-12 . . . Nationally known BENRUS at the price of an ordinary watch! Handsomely engraved white case fitted with a fully guaranteed SHOCKPROOF, JAR-PROOF, BENRUS movement. New type triple link bracelet to match. $15.95 — **Only $1.49 a month.**



17 Jewel WALTHAM "Diplomat"

Extra Leather Strap FREE!

$2.37 a month

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LJ-8 . . . Imagine this for only $2.37 a month! Factory guaranteed famous 17 Jewel WALTHAM **"Diplomat"** at a remarkably low price. Richly engraved, permanent white case with link bracelet to match and a smart, new leather strap included FREE. Usually $37.50 — now offered complete as shown at the sensationally low price of only **$24.75 — $2.37 a month.**

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LJ-7 . . . Gentleman's initial ring, very attractively priced. 10K Solid Yellow Gold, set with a brilliant, genuine diamond and 2 Solid White Gold Initials on contrasting, genuine black Onyx. (Specify initials desired.) **Only $1.59 a month.**

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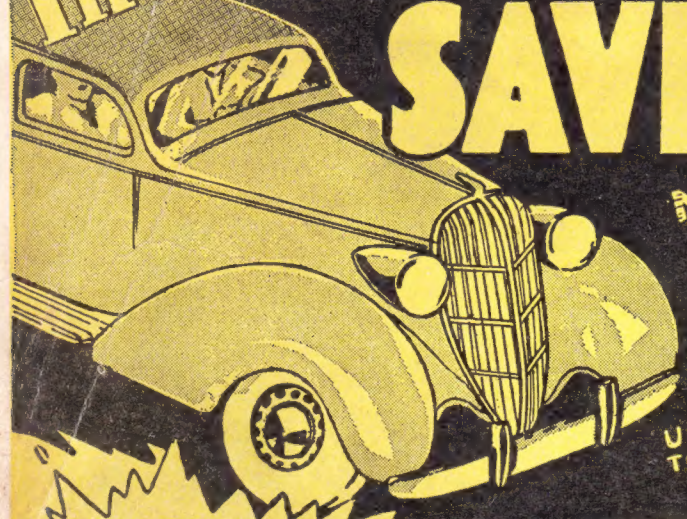

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MORE POWER
NEW MOTOR LIFE
QUICKER STARTING
UP TO 30% GAS SAVINGS

VACU-MATIC

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the Carburetor Control that "BREATHES"

AT LAST! Automotive engineers have smashed down the barriers to perfected combustion! The new VACU-MATIC solves the secret of greater power! With almost magical action, this amazing invention instantly puts new life and pep in any motor. It adds mileage to every gallon of gasoline . . . produces split-second pick-up, sensitive accelerator response, quicker starting, greater speed and smoother running.

Automatic .. Nothing Like It!

The self-starter—four wheel brakes—knee action—stream-lining . . . and now VACU-MATIC! The sensational money-saving invention! With it, engineers have achieved a practical means of balancing air and gasoline automatically for all speeds.

Vacu-matic is *entirely different!* It operates on the super charger principle by automatically adding a charge of extra oxygen, drawn free from the outer air, into the heart of the gas mixture. It is entirely AUTOMATIC and allows the motor to "breathe" at the correct time, opening and closing automatically as required. No idling troubles—no carburetor adjustments necessary. It is so simple it will amaze you—so practical it will save you many dollars on gas costs.

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MOTORIST SAVES $180.00 A YEAR

"On an International truck on a round trip to Cleveland, 385 miles, it saved 19 gallons of gas."—*James Seeley, N. Y.*

"On my V-8 Ford, it works miracles. Its added power, acceleration and top speed has sold me. The results are unbelievable."—*Ralph Fields, Mass.*

"Very glad to say, the Buick showed an increase of 5 miles more per gallon."—*A. V. Grove, Washington.*

"On my Plymouth, I obtained an average of 22 miles per gallon, an increase of 7 miles. This means a saving of $15 a month or $180 a year."—*F. S. Peck, Calif.*

"It saves me one gallon a day. I had to buy 5 gallons each day—now only 4 gallons."—*L. V. Sweet, Pa.*

"My Chevrolet certainly runs smoother, has more power and snap to it since I put the Vacu-Matic on."—*J. H. Nelson, Minn.*

"On my Dodge 8 I am getting 6 more miles per gal., with more power and pick-up, which is all anyone could ask."—*Lee D. Esty, Calif.*

"I have twelve Vacu-matics on cars now, and they all show an increase in mileage. The car owners are very well pleased."—*Fred Taylor, Okla.*

"I averaged 25 miles per gallon on a trip with a model A Ford at 40 miles per hour, where before I only averaged 20. Also better pickup and smoother running.—*Wm. Lyons, Calif.*

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VACU-MATIC proves itself on every car. It is guaranteed to give worthwhile gas savings, quicker pick-up, and more power or it costs you nothing. You can instantly tell the difference in added power and motor performance — you quickly notice the cash savings on gasoline.

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VACU-MATIC is constructed of six parts, assembled and fused into one unit, correctly adjusted and *sealed at the factory.* Nothing to regulate. Any motorist can attach VACU-MATIC in ten minutes. Once in, its only reminder is the surge of instant power and speed it gives to the motor and the savings it affords your pocketbook.

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VACU-MATIC offers a splendid opportunity for unusual sales and profits. Every car, truck, tractor and motorcycle owner a prospect. Valuable territories now being assigned. Check and mail coupon.

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Gentlemen: Please send me full particulars concerning the Vacu-matic and details of your Free Offer. This of course does not obligate me in any way.

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